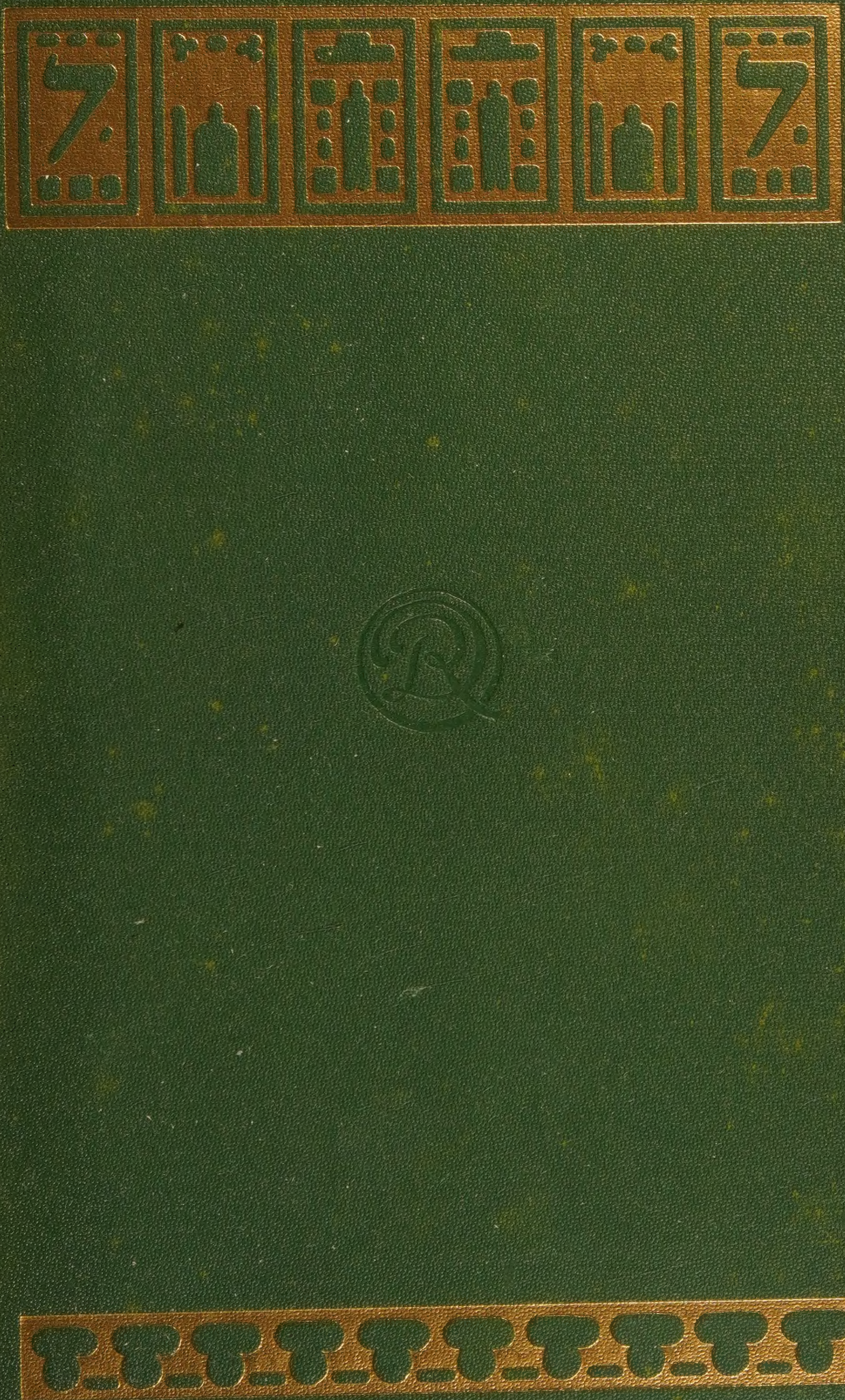
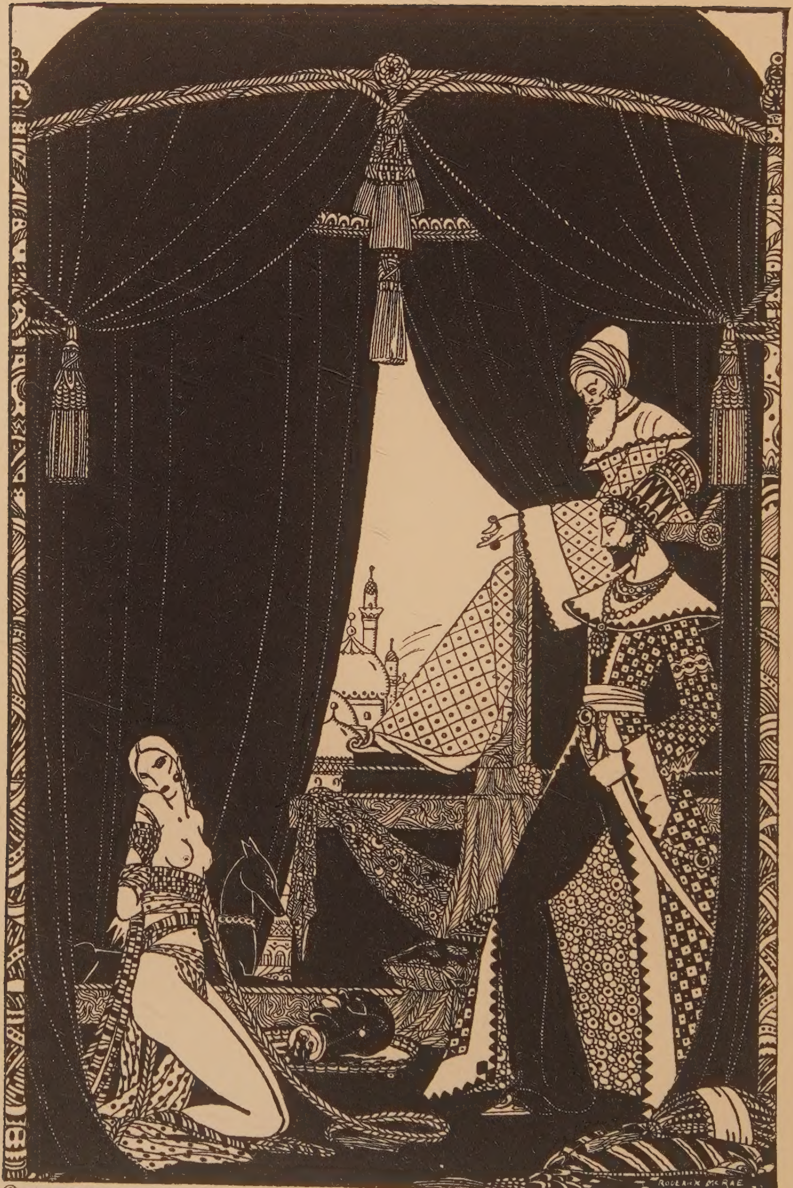


The Book of
THE THOUSAND NIGHTS
and ONE NIGHT


RODERICK McRAE 27

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"Such, O youth, is the whole story of Fircone."

The Book of

THE THOUSAND NIGHTS and ONE NIGHT

Rendered from the literal and complete
version of Dr. J. C. Mardrus;
and collated with other sources;
by

E. POWYS MATHERS

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The Book of
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Illustrations
from drawings by
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VOLUME EIGHT

NEW YORK
DINGWALL-ROCK, LTD.

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NEW EDITION, WITH REVISIONS

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DINGWALL-ROCK, LTD.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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THE SPLENDID TALE OF PRINCE DIAMOND

It is related in the books of the sublime folk, the scholars and poets who opened the palaces of their mind to those who groped in poverty,—therefore chosen and multiple thanks be unto Him who has given an excellence to certain men on earth even as He has placed the sun in the firmament, a lamp for the house of His glory, and has set the dawn upon the borders of the sky to be a torch for the nightly halls of His beauty; who has mantled the sky with cool silk and put a bright green garment upon the earth; who has decked the gardens with their trees, and the trees with verdant vests; who has given streams of bright water to those that thirst, who has given the shade of the vine to drunken men, to women beauty, and to Spring the rose; who has created a smile to grace the rose and a nightingale to sing of her; who has set woman before the eyes of man and has planted desire in his heart, a jewel within a stone! —that there was once a superb king in a great kingdom. His every step was a felicity, he kept fortune and happiness to wait upon him, his justice passed the justice of Khosru-Anushirwan and his generosity exceeded the generosity of Hatim of the tribe of Tayy.

This king, with the serene brow, was called Shams-

Shah, and he had an exquisitely mannered son whose beauty exceeded that of the star Canopus shining upon the sea.

One day young Diamond, for such was the prince's name, sought his father, saying: "Father, today my heart sickens of the city and I wish to go upon a hunting expedition. If I cannot do so I shall tear my garments to the very hem."

As he loved his son, Shams-Shah gave the necessary orders for this diversion. The officers of the hunt and the fowlers prepared the falcons, the grooms saddled the mountain horses, and Prince Diamond rode out joyfully at the head of a troop of ruddy-complexioned youth. Spurring forward in the heroic tumult, he came at last to the foot of a mountain whose summit wedded the sky. A great tree faced him and, at a stream, running by the roots of the tree, a deer drank with bended head. Diamond signed to his companions to halt and went forward, at the full fiery speed of his horse, to take the handsome prey alone. But the deer, realising his danger, escaped with a mighty bound and swift circling, and fled with the speed of an arrow across the plain. Diamond went headlong in pursuit, by sand and stone, until his horse came to a standstill, foaming and breathless, and lolled a parched tongue in the midst of a desert where there was no sign of human presence or hint that other than the Invisible had ever harboured there.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-fifth Night
Had come

She said:

As the deer had disappeared behind a sandy hill, Diamond, in his despair, climbed to the top of this and walked to the farther side. From that new vantage point he beheld, not the pitiless drought of the desert, but a cool oasis of living green, cut with silver brooks, and so meadowed with white and red flowers that it seemed to hold the half light of evening and the half light of morning. The prince rejoiced and was at ease, as if he had entered that garden which the winged Riswan guards.

After contemplating the admirable work of his Creator, the prince watered his horse and drank from a bubbling pool. Then he stood upright and looked about him. For the first time he noticed a lonely throne shaded by a very old tree whose roots must have reached to the innermost doors of earth. Upon this throne sat an aged king with a crown upon his head, and naked feet, who looked before him, wrapped in contemplation. Diamond respectfully greeted him, and the monarch answered his salutation, saying: "O son of kings, what has led you to cross this savage desert where no bird may fly and where even the blood of beasts of prey is turned to gall?" The prince told the story of his hunting and then asked, in his turn: "O venerable king, why do you sit here surrounded by desolation? Surely your story is a strange story?" "It is strange," answered the king, "It is so strange that you had better not ask to hear it, lest it be the cause to you of most unfortunate tears." "You may speak freely, O venerable monarch,'' said the prince, ''for I drank my mother's milk and am the son of my father.''

He cajolled the old king, until he said from his throne beneath the tree: ''Listen, then, to the words which come from the very shell of my heart. Let none escape, but gather all into the robe-folds of your understanding.'' He lowered his head for a moment and then, raising it, spoke again:

''Before I came to this isle in the desert, I reigned with riches and glory, with armies and a brilliant court, over the lands of Babylon, and Allah had given me seven royal sons to be my joy. All was prosperous peace with me until my eldest son chanced to learn, from the lips of a traveller, of a certain princess called Mohra, who dwelt in the far off countries of Sin and Masin. She was the daughter of King Qamus, son of Tammuz, and had not her equal in the world; the perfection of her beauty blackened the face of the new moon; Joseph and Zuleika would have worn chains before her. In a word, she followed the verses of the poet:

A thief of hearts, equipped with all bright implements,
With nard of gardens in her curls of hair,
With lips of ruby-sugared condiments
And in her cheek musk rose of gardens too,
And teeth like crystal when the sun is bare,
A thief of hearts, equipped with all bright implements,
For breaking through.

''The traveller told my eldest son that King Qamus had no other children and that, now that this charming bud from beauty's garden had come to the spring and the bees began to haunt about her flowering body, invitation had been sent into all lands that suitable princes should come to woo her. Claimants for her hand had to answer the princess's question: *What is the relation between Fircone and Cypress?* and the correct reply was the only dowry asked of any suitor. It was, however, made a condition that he who could not answer should have his head cut off and spiked upon a pinnacle of the palace.

"When my eldest son learned these details, his heart burnt like roasting flesh and he came to me in a tempest of tears, asking my permission to depart for the countries of Sin and Masin. Frightened by the rashness of his enterprise, I tried him with drugs and doctors and, when none could cure him, said: 'Light of my eyes, if your only hope of life is to go to the countries of Sin and Masin, and interview King Qamus son of Tammuz, the father of Princess Mohra, I will accompany you at the head of my armies. If the king consents to the marriage, all will be well, if not, I swear by Allah to shake the ruins of his palace down about his head, to cast his kingdom to the wind, and take his daughter for you by the strong hand.' But my son would have none of this, and answered: 'It would be against our dignity, my father, to take what we cannot win. I must set out alone, give the required answer, and woo the girl myself.'

"Then I saw better than at any other time that no man can efface one character which the winged scribe has written in the book of Destiny. Conceiving certainly that this thing was written in my son's fate, I gave him leave with many sighs, and he departed to follow his star.

"He came at last to the far kingdom of Qamus, presented himself at the palace where the Princess Mohra dwelt, and—could not answer the question. His head was ruthlessly struck off and impaled upon a pinnacle of the palace. I wept all the tears of despair and shut myself in with my grief for forty days; my friends covered their heads with dust, we tore the garments of patience, and all the halls of my court sent up a noise of mourning and a confusion as of Resurrection Day.

"Then my second son wounded my heart, drinking the wine of death as his brother had done. He perished in the same enterprise, and the five others also died, martyrs to this disastrous love.

"Bitten to the heart by black fate and beaten down by grief, I wandered away from my country and my royalty; I passed like a man in sleep over these plains and deserts, and now, with naked feet and a crown upon my head, I wait for death to visit my lonely throne."

When Prince Diamond heard the old king's tale, he was wounded by the murderous arrow of an unknown love, and sighed hot sighs. The poet says:

I saw not love, my eyes were closed, a dart
In by my ear made he.
I do not know what has passed between some lady
And my heart.

So much for the old king of Babylon upon his throne in the oasis, and for the sorrows of his life.

Though Prince Diamond had ordered his companions not to follow him, when they grew anxious at his long absence, they disobeyed and searched across the desert for him. They came upon him as he was leaving the oasis and, after clustering about him like butterflies about a rose, gave him a change horse whose action was lighter than the breeze and swifter than the imagination of man. He leapt into the gilded saddle and took the pearl-studded bridle in his hand; late in the day he came back to his father's palace with his troop.

Instead of finding his son healthily rejoiced by his hunting, Shams-Shah saw that his colour was changed and that he was plunged in some dark sea of grief. For love had eaten to Diamond's bones and fed upon the strength of his heart and liver.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-sixth Night
Had Come

She said:

At last the king's prayers prevailed upon Diamond to confess the reason of his grief; when the veil was torn aside, Shams-Shah embraced his son and clasped him to his breast, saying: "Refresh your eyes and calm your dear soul, for I will at once send my ambassadors to King Qamus son of Tammuz, in the lands of Sin and Masin, with a letter in my own hand demanding marriage, and many camels loaded with robes of price, jewels, and coloured gifts such as are worthy of kings. If Mohra's father is so ill-advised as to humble us by his refusal, I will despatch the armies of my devastation against him to roll his throne in blood and cast his diadem down the wind. Thus, in either case, the exquisitely-mannered Mohra shall become yours in all honour.''

Thus spake Shams-Shah from his gold throne, before his approving wazirs, emirs, and ulema; but Prince Diamond answered: ''O shelter of the world, this cannot be! I will go by myself, and answer the riddle myself. I will bring home the miraculous princess by my personal merit.''

The king groaned, as he replied: ''Son of my soul, so far my eyes have been bright and my body strong, because you are the consolation of my old royal heart and the sole prop of my brow. How can you now leave me, to run upon death?'' But, though he spoke this and much like it, his pleading was in vain and, rather than see his son die before his eyes of frustration, he was obliged to give him leave to depart.

Prince Diamond mounted upon a horse as handsome as if it had been of fairy stock, and galloped out upon the road leading to the kingdom of Qamus, while his father and mother rubbed hands of despair and sank into the bottomless pit of desolation.

The Prince journeyed from stage to stage, and came in safety to the city which he sought. He found himself facing a palace taller than a mountain, and beheld, spiked by thousands upon its pinnacles, crowned heads and uncrowned heads with waving hair. Tents of gold tissue and Chinese stain, with curtains of gilded muslin, were pitched in the open square, and a jewelled drum, with an engraved stick, hung at the principal door of the palace. Upon the drum was written in letters of gold: ''Let any of royal blood who desires to see Princess Mohra beat upon me.'' So Diamond dismounted without hesitation, and beat so loudly with the jewelled stick upon the drum that all the city trembled.

Men came from the palace and conducted the stranger into the presence of King Qamus, who was so smitten by his beauty that he wished to save him from death. "Alas, upon your youth, my son!" he said, "Why do you wish to throw away your life like all these others? Have pity upon yourself; renounce your wooing, and become my chamberlain. None but Allah knows and can explain the fantastic mysteries which hive in a girl's head." And, as Prince Diamond persisted in his demand, King Qamus said again: "Listen, my son: it would be a great grief for me to see a handsome youth from the cultivated eastern lands die thus ingloriously in my kingdom. I beg you, therefore, to take three days of consideration before you again seek an audience which will infallibly lead to the separation of your delightful head from the citadel of your body." So saying, he signed to the young man to retire.

Thus Prince Diamond was obliged to leave the palace on that day and to pass his time in an inspection of the shops and markets. Though he found the folk of Sin and Masin intelligent and polite, he could feel no peace till he had approached the dwelling of that lode-stone which had drawn him, a needle, from his own land. He loitered before the garden of the palace and considered how he might enter to gain a sight of the princess; fear of being stopped by the guards prevented him from making the attempt, until he noticed a canal which passed under the wall and into the garden. "Surely I can enter with the water," said he; and immediately, plunging into the stream, swam under the wall and climbed out upon the lawns of the garden.

He sat in a secluded place until the sun had dried his garments, and then began to walk slowly up and down among the thickets of flowers. The green garden bathed in her streams and was as richly dressed as a woman of rank upon a day of festival. The white rose smiled to her red sister, and the nightingales wooed both, as if they had been tender poets making love to the sound of lutes. Among the multiple beauty of the terraces, dew lay upon the purple of the roses, like tears upon the blushes of a startled girl. The birds were drunken with their own songs; in the cypresses by the water the obedient doves so crooned that the gardens of Iram seemed to be a thorn bush in comparison with that place.

As Prince Diamond slowly and cautiously made his way down an alley, a sudden turn brought him face to face with a white marble fountain beside which a silken carpet was spread out. Lying at ease upon this carpet, like a resting panther, lay a girl so fair that the whole garden shone because of her beauty. The smell of the curls of her hair rose up to Paradise, filling the dreams of the houris with amber.

The prince, who could no more help looking than a man with the dropsy could help drinking the water of the Euphrates, understood that such beauty could only belong to Mohra, for whom a thousand souls had perished like butterflies in the fire.

While he contemplated the princess in ecstasy, one of her girls approached the place where he was hidden, and leaned down to fill a gold cup at the stream. Suddenly she uttered a frightened cry and let the cup fall in the water; trembling and with her hand to her heart, she ran and hid among her companions, and they led her up to their mistress that she might explain her clumsiness.

When the child, whose name was Coral-Branch, had a little recovered from her agitation, she said to the princess: "O my mistress, O crown upon my head, while I leaned over the stream, I saw reflected in it so handsome a youth's face that I did not know whether it belonged to a mortal or an immortal. I was so moved by the appearance that I dropped the gold cup in the water."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-seventh Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

PRINCESS MOHRA AT once sent another of her girls to look in the water, and the second damsel ran back with a burnt heart, and moaning for love, to say to her mistress: "There is the face of an angel in the water, or the moon has fallen into the stream; I know not which."

Mohra felt kindle in her heart a spark of curiosity and a desire to see for herself; she rose to her charming feet and walked towards the stream with the pride of a young peacock. Upon its surface she saw Diamond's face reflected, and became pale and fell a prey to love.

Borne up in the arms of her girls, she called her old nurse to her, saying: "O nurse, if you would not have me die, fetch me that boy whose face is mirrored in the water." "I hear and I obey," answered the nurse, as she began to search among the thickets.

At length she discovered the delightful body of the prince in an angle of two trees, and saw a face of the sun of which the stars were jealous. The prince beheld her at the same moment and decided to pretend madness in order to save his life.

So, when the nurse, as if she were touching the wings of a butterfly, led him by the fingers into the presence of her peerless mistress, he laughed wildly and cried: "I am famished, but I am not hungry. The fly has turned into a buffalo; but the water has changed the cotton mountain into clay; I knew it would. The snow has melted all the wax and the camel has eaten the coal. I will devour the world, no one else shall do it." He showed the whites of his eyes and poured out a stream of the like insensate stuff, until the princess was convinced of his madness.

Mohra's heart was smitten with despair, she trembled like a half-killed fowl, and cried to her girls: "Alas, the pity of it!" for love had entered her bosom for the first time.

It was only after a long look that she could tear her eyes away from the young man, and say sadly to her following: "This young man is mad from possession, and I would have you remember that the afflicted of Allah are great saints, whom it is as impious to offend as to doubt the existence of the Lord or the divine origin of the Koran. He must be left here, to do as he wills in all liberty; none must say him nay or refuse the least of his demands." Then she turned to the youth, and kissed his hand with religious diffidence, murmuring: "O venerated santon, grace us by choosing this garden and that pavilion as your home, for you shall lack nothing in the way of entertainment." To this Diamond cried, with bulging eyes: "Necessary and nothing! Necessary and nothing! Necessary and nothing!"

Princess Mohra left him after a final bow, and departed from him with a heart half edified and half most desolate.

After this the young santon found himself surrounded by every sort of reverence and little care. His pavilion was served by the most devoted of Mohra's slaves, and was thickly piled, morning and evening, with dishes of varied meat and fruit conserves of every colour. His holiness was the edification of the palace, the garden paths were sedulously swept after him, and the rests of his meals, his nail parings, and the like, were eagerly collected for amulets.

One day Coral-Branch, who was Princess Mohra's favourite, entered, pale and trembling, into the young man's presence, and laid her head humbly against his feet. After sighs and groans, she said: "O crown upon my head, O master of perfection, Allah, who made your beauty, will, if you wish it, do more for you through my good offices. My sad heart trembles and melts like wax because of you; therefore have pity and tell me who you are and how you came to this garden, in order that I may serve you better for the knowledge." Fearing some trick of the princess, Diamond would not allow himself to be influenced by the supplications and burning glances of the girl. He babbled as if he had been really possessed and, though Coral-Branch beat about him as a night moth beats about a flame, he would not yield. At last she said: "The name of Allah and His Prophet be upon you and about you! If you have any pity, open the fans of your heart and waft the sweetness of your soul in my direction. It is as certain that you have a secret as that my heart is a coffer whose key is thrown away. Speak, for the coffer is filled full with love of you."

Convinced that the true perfume of love was in these words, the prince smiled quite sanely at the girl and then opened the fans of his heart, saying: "Delightful child, my reason for coming through a thousand pains and perils to this place was to answer the Princess Mohra's question concerning the Fircone and the Cypress. If, of your compassion, you could tell me the true solution, my heart would be greatly moved towards you. Surely you must believe me?"

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-eighth Night
Had Come

She said:

"Worthy young man," answered Coral-Branch, "I fully believe that the deer of your heart is compassionate, but, if you wish me to help you, you must first promise to marry me and set me at the head of all the palace women in your father's kingdom." At once the prince kissed the girl's hand and carried it to his heart, with a solemn promise that he would obey her in this matter.

Coral-Branch rejoiced, and said: "O capital of my life, there is a black man beneath Princess Mohra's ivory bed. He took up his abode there, unknown to all save my mistress, after he had fled from his native city of Wakak. It is he who pricked on the princess to ask that difficult question of all her royal suitors. If you wish to find the solution, you must journey to Wakak, for there alone it is to be found. That is all I know of the Fircone and Cypress, but Allah knows all!"

"O my heart," cried Diamond silently, "we must be patient until some light shines from behind the curtain of mystery. But, O my heart, surely many grievous things await you on the road to Wakak!" Then, aloud and to the girl, he said: "O help of mine, until I have gone to the city of that black man and pierced the shadow of the riddle, dalliance is forbidden me, but, if Allah allows me to return in success and safety, I will either accomplish your desire or never lift my head until the Resurrection." He left the sighing, sobbing, and moaning Coral-Branch and, making his way unperceived out of the garden, fetched his belongings from the khan where he had left them. Then, mounting upon his horse, as handsome as if it had been of fairy breed, he set out upon the road of Allah.

As he did not know the situation of the city of Wakak or the road by which he might reach to it, he was looking about for some direction, when he saw a dervish coming towards him wearing a green robe and citron yellow slippers. The man carried a stick in his hand and his face so shone with holiness and knowledge that he seemed like Khizr, guardian of all green things. Prince Diamond lighted off his horse and, after saluting the dervish, asked him the way to Wakak. The holy man regarded his questioner attentively for a whole hour and then answered: "O son of kings, seek not a road endless and filled with terror, renounce your rash pursuit; for you might spend your life fruitlessly in searching for the way to Wakak, and, if you stumbled upon it, you would lose your soul." "O respectable and venerated sheikh," answered Diamond, "my business and object in Wakak are so important to me that I would sacrifice a thousand lives as worthless as my own upon the journey. Therefore, if you know anything of the way, I pray you, who resemble Khizr in appearance, to be like him also in kindness and guiding quality.''

When the dervish saw that the prince would not be moved from his purpose, he was constrained to say: ''O youth of benediction, the city of Wakak lies in the centre of Kaf, and in and about Kaf dwell all the Jinn. There are three roads to it, but only the right-hand road is practicable. If you journey on from here for a day and a night you will behold, at the rising of the true dawn, a minaret bearing a plate of marble written upon in Kufic character. Read that inscription and act upon it!''

Prince Diamond kissed the old man's hand in thanks and then continued his journey upon the right-hand road. After a day and a night he came to the minaret and found it as tall as the blue sky. Graven upon a plate of marble let into its surface were these words in Kufic character: ''The three roads which lie before you lead to Wakak; if you take the left hand road you will experience many trials and vexations; if you take the right hand road you will bitterly repent of it; if you take the middle road you will find it terrible.''

After he had read, Prince Diamond lifted a handful of earth and cast it inside the bosom of his garment, crying: ''May I be dust before I fail!'' He remounted and, choosing the middle and most dangerous road, galloped forward for a day and a night. In the morning he came within sight of an open space, covered with trees so tall that their branches brushed the sills of Paradise. These trees were disposed in straight lines to enclose a garden of living green and shield it from the savage wind. The entrance to this garden was blocked by a tall square of granite, and was guarded by so black a negro that his very presence shadowed all the flowers. This child of pitch was a giant, his upper lip rose above his nostrils in the shape of an artichoke, and his lower lip fell about his neck. He had the millstone of a mill slung for a shield across his breast, and wore a sword of Chinese steel, hanging from a belt formed of iron rings so great that a war elephant could easily have passed through each. At the time of the prince's arrival, this dark guardian, lying flat upon the skins of wild beasts, sent forth a thunderous snoring from his open mouth.

Diamond dismounted fearlessly, fastened his horse near the negro's head, and, climbing over the granite block, entered the garden.

The air of the place was such that the trees wavered and balanced as if they had drunken wine; in and out among them walked great deer with ornaments of jewelled gold hung about their horns, with brocade handkerchiefs fastened from their necks, and embroidered cloaks upon their backs. All these animals, with feet and eyes and brows, signed violently to the prince that he should not enter, but Diamond, construing these movements as abundant welcome, began to walk calmly up and down the alleys of the garden. He came at length to an immortal palace, and found the door as invitingly open as a lover's eye. In the entrance he could see a charming fairy head, smiling and glancing from left to right, white enough to have twisted the full moon with jealousy, and having eyes to shame the eyes of the jonquil.

When this vision of beauty beheld Prince Diamond, she was stupefied by his daring and captivated by his beauty. After a few moments' pause, she answered his greeting, and asked: "Who are you, O daring youth, that you should allow yourself to profane a garden where even the birds of the air fear to move their wings?'' Thus spake the girl Latifa to Prince Diamond, and her beauty was the sedition of that time.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-ninth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

DIAMOND BOWED TO the earth and then straightened himself, as he answered: ''O cast from the garden of perfection for too much perfection, O my mistress, I am Prince Diamond, son of . . .'' and he told her his whole story from beginning to end; but nothing would be gained by repeating it in this place.

When she had heard all, Latifa took him by the hand and drew him down beside her upon a carpet stretched in the shade of a vine. ''O walking cypress from the terraces of beauty,'' she said, ''alas for your youth! O fretful plan! O difficulty! O great danger! If you love your dear life you must renounce your goal. You must stay here with me and touch the neck of my desire with the benediction of your hand; for it is better to lie with fairy beauty than to chase the shadow of the unknown.'' But Diamond answered: ''Until I have been to the city of Wakak and solved the riddle of the Fircone and the Cypress, all pleasure is a forbidden thing to me; but I swear, O very beautiful, that I will return, when I have succeeded, and place the collar of love about the neck of your desire.'' ''Abandoned heart,'' cried Latifa, as she signed to certain rose-cheeked wine boys who stood far off. She summoned girls of astonishing loveliness, and cups of welcome were passed round, amid singing, to celebrate the coming of that charming stranger, yet the presence of the women mingled with the music until it overcame the wine.

When the cups were empty, the prince rose to take leave; after courteous thanks, he said: "O princess of all the world, I seek your immediate permission to depart, for, if I stay a moment longer, the fire of love for you will spread among the harvest of my soul. But, if Allah wills, I shall return to pluck the roses of desire and drink of another cup."

Burning for the boy, Latifa rose up also and, seizing a serpent-circled staff, breathed strange words above it. Then, with a sudden movement, she struck the prince on the shoulder, so violently that he spun round three times and fell to the earth; even as he touched the grass, he lost his human form and became another of the deer of that garden.

Latifa fastened to his horns such an ornament as the other deer carried, tied a brocaded silk handkerchief about his neck, and loosed him into the garden, crying: "Go to your kind, since you would have none of fairy beauty!" Diamond the deer went off on all fours, an animal in appearance but still a man within.

He wandered with his magicked fellows, meditating a way of escape, and thus came to a corner of the garden where the wall was sensibly lower than at any other part. Lifting his soul to the Master of Destiny, he leaped into the air and cleared the obstacle, but he came down in the same garden, as if he had never crossed the wall. Seven times he leaped forwards, and ever, because of enchantment, he found himself in the same place. The sweat of impatience poured from his hoofs and he paced up and down beside the wall like a caged lion, until, facing him, he saw a window-like opening, which had not been visible when he had passed that way before. Dragging himself painfully through, he found himself, this time, beyond the magic garden and in a second, the perfume of whose flowers lifted his brain like wine.

At the end of an alley he perceived a palace and, at a window of the palace, a young girl's face which had the tender colour of tulips and eyes which would have been the envy of a Chinese gazelle. Her amber-coloured hair held all the sun, the white of her cheeks was of Persian jasmin. Her head was outside the window, and she smiled in the direction of Prince Diamond.

As soon as the prince came near the window, the girl rose and ran down into the garden. She plucked a tuft of grass and held it out gently, with a soft clicking of her tongue, as if to tame this new animal and prevent him running away at her approach. Diamond the deer, who asked nothing more than to plumb this second mystery, ran up to the child as if he were hungry. When he was within reach, Gamila—for such was her name and she was the sister of Latifa by the same father but not by the same mother—seized the silk cord about his neck and led him into the palace, where she fed him with fruits and other refreshments until he could eat not more.

When his meal was finished, Diamond dropped his head on the girl's shoulder and began to weep. She caressed him delicately and pitifully with her soft hands, so that he lowered his head to her feet and wept again. "Why do you weep, my dear, my deer?" she said, "I love you better than I love myself!" But he redoubled his tears and rubbed his head so sorrowfully against Gamila's feet that she understood at last that he was praying for his human form.

Though she held her sister in great fear, she rose and took a little jewelled box from a hollow in the wall. Then she made ritual ablution, dressed herself in seven robes of freshly whitened linen, and took a morsel of electuary from the box.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-tenth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

SHE PLACED THE fragment in the deer's mouth and at the same time pulled strongly on the cord about his neck, so that he shook himself and came out, a man, from the leathern skin.

He kissed the earth between young Gamila's hands, saying: "O princess, you have saved me from the claws of destruction, and given back my life with my humanity. Though each hair on my head is filled with a separate praise of your goodness and great beauty, my tongue stumbles in its thanks, O glory!" But Gamila raised him and, after dressing him in royal garments, said: "O prince with the white body, whose beauty has lighted our garden and our dwelling, what is your name? Why have you honoured us by your coming, and how did you fall into my sister's nets?"

Prince Diamond told his preserver the story of his adventure, and, when he had finished, she said: "O Diamond, O eye of my heart, I beg you to give up this dangerous and barren undertaking, and not to expose your delightful youth and precious life to unknown powers. It is foolish to die for no profit. Stay here and fill the cup of your life with the wine of my desire. I am ready to serve you in all things, to put your interest before my own, and obey you as a child obeys its mother." "O princess," answered Diamond, "my debts to you weigh so heavily upon the wings of my soul that I feel I should flay away my skin and make sandals of it for those little feet. You clothed me again in the garment of humanity and my life belongs to you. But I dare to beg you to allow me absence for a few days; when, thanks to the security which Allah will vouchsafe, I return from the city of Wakak and behold again the magic of your feet, my way shall be yours for ever."

When Gamila saw that none of her entreaties would turn the prince from his purpose, she said with a deep sigh: "Fruit of my heart, since no man may escape the destiny which hangs about his neck, and since you are determined to leave me at this same moment of our meeting, I will give you three objects of my inheritance to guard you upon your way and bring you back to me." She opened another chest in the hollow of the wall and drew from it a gold bow with arrows, a sword of Chinese steel, and a jade-hilted dagger. These things she gave to Diamond, saying: "This bow and these arrows belonged to the prophet Salih (upon whom be prayer and peace!). This sword, which is known as the Scorpion of Sulayman, is so keen that it could split a mountain as if the substance of it were soap. And this dagger, forged in the old days by Tammuz the Wise, preserves the wearer from all attack by a secret virtue in its blade. . . . But you will never reach the city of Wakak, which is beyond seven oceans, without the help of my uncle, the Simurg. Therefore place your ear to my lips and listen carefully to my instruction: dear friend, a day's march from this place is a fountain, and by the fountain is the palace of a negro king named Tak-Tak. It is guarded by forty bloody Ethiopians, each commanding an army of five thousand savage negroes; but King Tak-Tak will be your friend when he sees the arms which I have given you. He will be even gracious, though it is his custom to grill all strangers and eat them without salt or sauce. You must stay with him for two days and, after that time, allow him to send you with a guide to the palace of my uncle, the Simurg, by whose help it may be that you shall reach Wakak and resolve the problem of the Fircone and the Cypress. Above all, dear Diamond, take care not to depart by one hair's breadth from my advice." She kissed him, and added: "Because of your absence my life will be an evil upon my heart. Until you come back to me I shall not smile, I shall not speak, I shall not shut the door of sadness against my soul. Sighs shall rise like a fountain from my heart, and I shall have no more news of my body. Without the strength and prop which your love has given me, my body will be but a mirage of my soul." Then she sighed out these lines:

Far from the eyes which the narcissus loves
Cast not my heart;
Mock not the crying of the drunkards,
Lead them back to the tavern.

The armies of his boy's beard
Compass my heart,
And, as a wounded rose,
The rent in my robe shall not be sewn.

O brown tyrannous beauty,
My heart lies at your feet of jasmin,
My heart of a little girl at your thief's feet.

Afterwards the girl took leave of Diamond with many prayers to Allah for his safety, and hastened back into her palace to hide her tears.

The prince mounted his horse and rode on, in the immortal fairness of his youth, until he came to the fountain and the strong castle of Tak-Tak, the terrible king of the negroes.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-eleventh Night
Had Come

She said:

Though he found the approaches to the castle guarded by foul-faced Ethiopians, each ten cubits tall, he dismounted fearlessly and, after fastening his horse, sat down beneath the tree of the fountain to rest himself. "Fresh meat at last," he heard one of the Ethiopians say, and another answer: "Let us carry the windfall in to Tak-Tak." With that, ten or twelve of the fiercest guards surrounded the prince and would have dragged him into their master's presence.

But, when Diamond realised that the turning point in his life had come, he drew Sulayman's Scorpion from his belt and, rushing upon his aggressors, sent many of them hurrying down the slope of death. Even as their hellish spirits fled, news of the affair was brought to Tak-Tak who, in a red rage, sent the pitch-faced Mak-Mak, his war chief, to bring in the audacious stranger. This Mak-Mak, who was the well-known calamity of that time, came on at the head of his tar-coloured army, as if leading an eruption of hornets, and black death looked forth terribly from his eyes.

The prince rose up on his two feet and waited with stretched thews. The calamitous Mak-Mak, hissing like a horned viper and bellowing through his nostrils, came all against him and brandished a smashing club above his head; but Diamond stretched forth his hand, clasping the dagger of Tammuz, and thrust it between the giant's ribs. This son of a thousand horns drank death in a single draught, and the angel of Allah came near to him.

Seeing their chief fall, the rest fled, as sparrows flee before the Father of Beaks; but Diamond pursued them and slaughtered as many as he chose.

When King Tak-Tak learnt of Mak-Mak's discomfiture, rage rose in his nostrils until he could not distinguish his right hand from his left. Stupidity sent him forth to attack the crown of valley riders, Diamond, the peerless knight; but, when he saw the hero stand shouting before him, this black son of fat-nosed shame felt his muscles relax, the sack of his stomach turn upon him, and the wind of death pass over his brow. Diamond took him for target, and sent against him one of the arrows of the prophet Salih (upon whom be prayer and peace!) so that he swallowed the dust of his own heels and hastened to those lost places where the Nurse of Vultures is accustomed to set down her load.

As soon as the prince had heavily crusted the meat of the dead king with his dead servants, he went up to the palace and knocked upon the door with the air of a conqueror. A girl opened to him, whom this same Tak-Tak had cheated of the throne of her inheritance; she stood like a frightened deer, and her face was salt upon a lover's wound. Truthfully, if she had not gone further to meet Diamond it was because she was blessed with so magnificent and remarkable a benediction that she could not move easily with such a great weight which trembled like curdled milk. Her amazement at seeing Diamond was so vast that she could not immediately collect her wits. Finally she understood what had occurred.

She received her liberator with effusion and would have had him mount her dead father's throne, which had been reft away by Tak-Tak, but he refused any reward. Quite won over by his generosity, she asked: "O handsome youth, what religion is it which makes you do good with no thought of recompense?" "The faith of Islam is my faith, O Princess," answered Diamond, "and her belief is my belief." "In what does that faith and that belief consist, my master?" she asked again, and he replied: "Simply in attesting the Unity, through the profession revealed by our Prophet (upon whom be prayer and peace!)." "And what profession can make men so perfect?" she demanded. "These simple words: *There is no God but Allah and Muhamad is the Prophet of Allah!*" replied Prince Diamond, "He who pronounces them with conviction is, at the moment, ennobled in Islam. Were he the last of unbelievers, yet he would become the equal of the most noble Mussulman." Princess Aziza felt her heart move towards the true Faith. Of her own accord she raised her hand and, lifting her index finger to the height of her eyes, pronounced the Shehada. Thus was she ennobled in Islam.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-twelfth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

THEN SHE SAID to Prince Diamond: "O my master, now that you have made me queen and I have been lighted into the way of truth, I stand between your hands ready to serve you with my eyes and to be a slave among the slaves of your harem. Will you, as a favour, accept the queen of this land for your bride and live with her in what ever place is pleasing to you, whirling her delighted in the auriole of your beauty?" "My mistress, you appear to me as life itself," answered Diamond, "but at the moment I am engaged upon a very important business, for which I left my father and my mother and my native land. It may be that, even now, King Shams-Shah, the author of my days, weeps me as dead. My destiny waits for me in the city of Wakak, but, if Allah favours me and I return, I will marry you, take you to my native land, and rejoice eternally in your beauty. . . . Can you tell me where I may find the Simurg, the uncle of Princess Gamila? Only he can guide me to Wakak, but at present I am ignorant of his dwelling and his kind. If you know anything of him, hasten to tell me, for the sooner I am gone the sooner I will return."

Queen Aziza mourned bitterly in her heart, but, seeing that her tears and sighs could not turn the prince from his purpose, she rose from her throne and, taking him by the hand, led him in silence through the galleries of the palace and out into the garden.

It was such a garden as Rizwan watches: its avenues were unending lines of roses and, as the light wind wandered sifting out their musk, the heart was lifted into Paradise. The tulip opened, drunk with her own blood; and the cypress murmured throughout all her leaves praise of the measured singing of the nightingale. The streams ran like laughing children at the feet of rose trees, rhyming with their roses.

For all the heavy splendours below her slight waist, Princess Aziza managed to lead Diamond to the foot of a great tree, whose generous foliage was shading the sleep of a giant. She brought her lips close to the prince's ear, and whispered: "This is he whom you seek, the Flying Simurg, Gamila's uncle. If, on waking, he opens his right eye first he will be pleased to see you, and, recognising the arms which his niece has sent, will do all that you may ask. But if, by evil fortune, he opens his left eye first, you will be lost, for your great valiance cannot prevent him lifting you in the air, as a falcon lifts a sparrow, and breaking your dear bones, my love, against the ground. And now, my sweet, may Allah guard you and send you back to her who is already weeping for your absence."

Then she quitted him hastily, her eyes filled with tears and her cheeks turned suddenly pomegranate flowers.

Diamond waited an hour for the Flying Simurg to wake, and meanwhile said to himself: "Why do they give him that name? How could so great a giant rise in the air without wings, even on the ground how could he move except clumsily?" At last he lost patience at the monster's snoring, which was like that of a herd of young elephants, and, bending down, began to tickle the soles of his feet. Immediately the giant twitched and, kicking the air with his leg, let a terrifying fart. At the same moment he opened both eyes at once. When he saw the prince and recognised him as the author of his waking, he lifted one leg and thundered forth a procession of farts which lasted for an hour of time, and surely should have poisoned every living thing within a radius of four parasangs. Indeed Diamond only escaped the infernal tempest by the virtue of the weapons which he carried.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-thirteenth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

WHEN THE SIMURG had exhausted his provision, he sat up and looked at the prince with stupefaction. "What is this, O human," he cried, "how did you escape the blastments of my bum?" He looked more closely at the youth and, seeing the weapons, rose hastily to his feet. "Pardon my behaviour, master," he said with a low bow, "If you had warned me of your coming by some slave, I would have strewn your path with all the hairs of my body. I trust that you will forget my quite involuntary greeting. Also I hope that you will tell me at once what pressing business has brought you into this place, which neither man nor animal can reach unaided, that I may assist you the more quickly in it."

After assuring the Simurg of his goodwill, Prince Diamond told him every detail of his story and his desire. When he had finished, the giant lifted the young man's hand to his heart, his lips, and his brow, saying: "Be it upon my head and before my eyes! We will set out for the city of Wakak as soon as I have prepared my provisions. For that it will be necessary for me to hunt down some of the wild asses which infest our forest here, that I may make *kababs* with their flesh and waterbags out of their skins. When that is done, you shall mount on my shoulder and I will fly across the seven oceans with you, sustaining myself with the *kababs* and the water, until we reach the city of your desire."

Without further delay he strode into the forest and caught seven wild asses, one for the transit of each ocean. As soon as the *kababs* and the water skins had been prepared, he filled the latter and swung them about his neck; then he loaded the former into a foodbag, which he wore about his waist, and helped the prince to sit astride his shoulder.

Finding himself in this position, Diamond said to himself: "Here is a giant larger than an elephant and yet he pretends that he will fly with me in the air without the use of wings! As Allah lives, it is a prodigy, an unheard-of thing!" But, even as he thus reflected, he heard a noise as of wind passing through the chink of a door, and saw the giant's belly swell and swell, until it became as large as a dome. The noise of wind grew into the noise of bellows, as the giant extended.

Suddenly the Simurg beat the earth with his foot and a moment later was planing above the garden. He moved his legs in the air, as a frog swims in water, until he came to a height which pleased him; then he went forward in a straight line towards the west. Whenever he found that the wind lifted him too high, he would let one or two or three or four farts, of varied length and strength; when, by this perdition, his belly sagged, he took in air through mouth and nose and ears.

The two journeyed thus, as swift as birds, across one ocean after another, and, when the transit of each sea had been safely made, they would come to earth for a short time, in order to eat their *kababs* of wild ass and drink the water from the skins. Also, the giant would lie down for a few hours to reinforce his strength.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-fourteenth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

AFTER SEVEN DAYS of this aerial flight, they found themselves one morning above a shining white city which slept among its gardens. "You are now as a son to me," said the Simurg to the prince, "and I regret none of the fatigues which I have endured in bringing you to this place. I will set you down on the highest terrace of the city, for we have reached Wakak, the place of the black man who lives under Princess Mohra's ivory bed. Here, if anywhere, you will find out about the Fircone and the Cypress."

The Simurg let out air and floated down until he could gently set Prince Diamond on the terrace. In taking leave he gave him a tuft of his beard hairs, saying: "Guard these carefully and, when trouble comes to you or you have need of me to carry you back, burn one of them to summon me." Then he took in air again and, swimming easily up into the sky, set off rapidly towards his home.

Diamond sat down on the terrace, and was reflecting how he might descend to the street without attracting attention, when the master of the house, a youth of unparalleled beauty, came up on to the terrace and greeted him with a smile, saying: "O most handsome of men, you have brought bright morning to my terrace. Are you an angel or a Jinni?" "Dear youth, I am a human being who has begun his day delightfully through seeing you," answered Prince Diamond, "It is my destiny which has led me to your most fortunate dwelling; that is all I can tell you." He clasped the young man to his breast, and the two swore eternal friendship. They went down together into the guest room and feasted in company. Glory be to Allah for uniting two such fair creatures, and freeing their path from complication!

When they had sealed their friendship by eating and drinking together, Prince Diamond turned to his host, who was none other than Farah, the favourite of the sultan of Wakak, and said to him: "O Farah, as you are loved of the sultan and must know all the secret affairs of the kingdom, will you do me a favour which can cost you nothing?" "Be it upon my head and before my eyes!" replied young Farah, "Speak, and, if it be sandals made out of my skin that you require, I will give them willingly." Then said Diamond: "I only wish you to tell me what is the relation between Fircone and Cypress, and to explain the business of the negro who lies beneath the ivory bed of Princess Mohra, daughter of King Qamus, master of Sin and Masin."

Young Farah changed colour and his eyes grew troubled; he trembled as if he had seen the angel of death and, when Diamond tried to calm him with gentle words, said in a voice from which he strove to keep his anguish: "O Diamond, the king has ordered the death of any citizen or traveller who utters those two words, for he himself is Cypress and the name of his queen is Fircone. That is all I can tell you in answer to your question. Of their relations I know nothing, and of the negro below the bed I know nothing. The king alone holds the answer to your riddle. If you like, I will take you to the palace and make you known to him, for you are certain to please him mightily."

Diamond thanked his new friend, and the two set out hand in hand, as it had been two angels walking, to the palace. King Cypress rejoiced at the sight of Diamond and gazed at him a full hour before bidding him approach. The Prince kissed the earth between this monarch's hands and, after greeting, offered him a red pearl threaded on a chaplet of yellow amber, so precious that the whole kingdom of Wakak could not have bought its like. Cypress accepted the present with great content, and then said: "O youth girt with all grace, ask me any favour in return and it shall be granted." "O king of time," answered Diamond, who had eagerly expected these words, "Allah prevent me from asking aught save the favour of becoming your servant! Yet, if you insist that I ask more, grant me a promise of safety and I will speak from my heart."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-fifteenth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

WHEN KING CYPRESS had given him leave to speak and promised him safety, Prince Diamond reflected for a moment and then answered boldly: "My lord, the deaf and the blind are happy, for they are immune from those evils which enter by our ears and eyes. O shield of the world, since the evil day when I heard tell that which I shall now relate, I have known neither happiness nor sleep." When he had told his whole story from beginning to end, he added: "Now that my destiny has led me rejoicing into your bright presence, and now that you have deigned to promise a gratification of my wish, I ask simply; what is the exact relation between our master, King Cypress, and our mistress, Fircone, and what is the negro doing under the ivory bed of Princess Mohra, daughter of King Qamus, son of Tammuz, master of Sin and Masin?"

The king's colour and manner changed together; he became like a flame, his breast bubbled like a cauldron upon coals. "Woe, woe upon you, O stranger!" he cried, "I swear by the life of my throne that, if I had not promised you security, your head would be already severed from your body!" "Pardon my indiscretion, O king of time! But I have only acted as you gave me leave," ventured the prince, "Whatever you feel in the matter, you are bound by your oath to tell me what I wish to know, for you have granted me the fulfilment of my desire, and my sole desire is to be told."

King Cypress was thrown into perplexity and despair, his soul wavered between a wish to keep his oath and a wish to kill his questioner; the second instinct was the stronger, but for the time being he schooled it, saying: "O son of Shams-Shah, why will you force me to give your life to the wind, with no profit to yourself? Abandon this rash idea and ask me for something else, even for half of my kingdom." "My soul desires nothing but an answer, King Cypress," insisted the prince. "It is permitted," sighed the king, "but, when I have told you the secret, you must surely die." "Be it upon my head and before my eyes, O king of time!" answered Prince Diamond, "When I have learnt the relation between Cypress and Fircone, and the business of the negro, I will make my ablution and deliver my head to the sword."

Cypress grieved, doubly, for his secret and for the handsome prince's life. For an hour he reflected with bent head and then, after whispering certain instructions to his guard, caused them to clear the hall. Soon a troop of soldiers entered leading a handsome greyhound by a jewelled red leather trace; when they had ceremoniously spread a square brocaded carpet, the greyhound sat down upon one of its corners. Immediately twelve bloody Ethiopians led in a slim and tender girl, of marvellous beauty, with her hands tied behind her back, and set her down on the opposite corner of the carpet, facing the greyhound. Then they placed before her a dish containing a negro's head, so subtly preserved with aromatic salts that it seemed to have been freshly severed. At a sign from the king, the master cook of the palace supervised the placing of a whole service of delightful meats before the dog; the animal ate till it was satisfied and then the broken food was piled on to a dirty common plate, and set in front of the bound damsel. At first she wept and then she smiled; the tears that fell changed into pearls, and the smiles that escaped her into roses. With great care an Ethiopian picked up the pearls and roses, and gave them to the king.

"Now either the sword or the rope remains for you," said King Cypress, but the prince answered: "I will die when I have heard the explanation of what I have seen, but not before."

So King Cypress folded the hem of his royal robe over his left foot and, cupping his chin in the palm of his right hand, spoke as follows:

"O son of King Shams-Shah, the girl, whose tears were pearls and whose smiles were roses, is Fircone and my queen. I am King Cypress, master of the land and city of Wakak."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-sixteenth Night
Had Come

She said:

"One day I left my city to go hunting and was overcome by burning thirst in the desert; I hunted on all sides for water but I was well-nigh exhausted before I found a shadowy cistern, which had been digged by some ancient people. Thanking Allah, I made my painful way across obstacles of ruin, and let my bonnet down into the cistern at the end of a rope fashioned from my turban and my belt. My heart was refreshed even by the sound of this improvised bucket striking the water, but alas, wrestle as I might, I could not pull it up again. The bonnet had become as heavy as if it were filled with all the calamities of the world. 'There is no power or might save in Allah!' I cried down from my parched throat, 'O dwellers in this cistern, whether Jinn or human, have compassion upon a poor man dying of thirst and let go of my bucket! O illustrious inhabitants, my breath is well-nigh spent, my mouth burns!'

"I cried and groaned in my torment until an answer came up to me: 'Life is better than death, O servant of Allah! If you pull us up out of the well, we will reward you! Life is better than death!'

"Forgetting my thirst for a moment, I assembled my waning forces; with one great effort I drew up the bonnet, and beheld, clinging to it by their fingers, two very old blind women, each bent like bows and so thin that she could have been passed through the eye of a bodkin. Their eyelids lay deep in their heads, their jaws had no teeth, their heads wagged lamentably, their limbs trembled, and their hair was as white as carded cotton. Quite unmindful now of my thirst, I asked them pitifully the reason of their prisoning in the cistern, and they said: 'O young man of our help, we once incurred the anger of our master, King of the Jinn of the First Bed, so that he blinded us and threw us into this place. We will now show you a way to bring back our sight and, when we are cured, will satisfy the least or greatest of your desires. Not far from here you will find a river upon whose banks a cow comes frequently to graze. If you collect some of her dung and smear it on our eyes, our seeing will return to us. . . . But you must be careful not to let the cow see you, for, if she does, she will not ease herself.'

"I made my way to the river, which I had not seen in my searchings, and hid myself behind the reeds there. Soon a cow as white as silver came up out of the water, eased herself largely, cropped some grass, and then disappeared again into the stream. I hastened, with a considerable supply of the fresh dung, back to the cistern and there anointed the eyes of the two old women, until they saw clearly and looked round eagerly.

" 'O master,' they cried, kissing my hands, 'do you wish wealth, health, or a sample of beauty?' 'Good aunts,' I answered without hesitation, 'Allah of His generosity, has given me both health and wealth; but with beauty no man can fill his heart enough. Let me have the sample of which you speak.' 'Be it upon our heads and before our eyes!' said they, 'This sample is the daughter of our king. She is a laughing rose leaf, nay, she is the rose itself, wild rose and garden rose at once. Her eyes languish as with wine, and one of her kisses would calm a thousand griefs. The sun is beaten back from the sky by her beauty, the moon burns for her. Her father and mother love her so that she lies ever upon their breasts; her beauty is the beginning of their day. She shall belong to you, with all that there is hidden of her, and you shall rejoice together in your youth.' "

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-seventeenth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

" 'WE WILL LEAD you to her now, and all that there is to do you can do together. But take care that her father does not see you, or he will cast you alive into the furnace. Yet, even if that worst befall, we shall be there to save you; we shall smear your body with the oil of Pharaoh's serpents, so that you can lie for a thousand years in the bosom of the flame and come up out of it refreshed as by a bath in the streams of Iram.'

"After thus tempting and warning me, the two old women transported me into an inner chamber of the palace which belonged to the king of the Jinn of the First Bed, and there I saw the girl of my destiny, a smiling body compact of light, lying upon a bed. To look at her long would have washed your mind of reason and life itself. The arrow of desire passed through my heart; I stood with my mouth open, while my blood coursed through my veins like running tongues of fiercest flames.

"Seeing the effect which she had upon me, the damsel of delight pursed up her rose leaf lips as if offended, but her mischievous eyes said very plainly: 'Yes!' In a voice which she strove vainly to make harsh, she said: 'O human, what gave you the audacity to come here? Are you not afraid that you will wash your hands of life?' But I, reading her true thoughts, made bold to answer: 'O delicious mistress, would not I buy this sight of you with life itself? As Allah lives, you are written in my destiny and I but come in obedience to my fate. By those dark diamonds which are your eyes, I conjure you not to waste this useful time in idle words!'

"Suddenly the girl quitted her careless pose and laid aside her pretence of royal indignation. She smiled at me and in that smile was all the seductive guile of ten thousand paradisal houris. Her face was more fair than the slender new moon on the fourteenth night. Her lips were twin bars of carnelian hiding two bracelets of precious pearls. When she spoke, the sound of her voice was as fair water caressing the pebbles of its course; sweeter than the sweetest honey. She gave me tender greeting and bade me welcome.

"There were none present save ourselves and God, so that we gave ourselves up to a pure and faultless joy. We passed all of the day and all of the night together in the sheerest ecstasy. Caresses sweeter than *baklawah* passed freely between us. I found my princess tender and submissive, yet skilled and daring; shy and demure, yet bold and artful; in short, she responded to my moods and whims as the strings of a lute respond with ravishing harmonies to the fingers of the skilled lute player. She was perfection of perfection and I almost counted the risk of my head small enough price to be with her. We did not cease from our delightful endearments until dawn called us to prayer and the customary ablutions.

"A month slipped by without anyone suspecting my presence in the palace, or dreaming that two led a life of silent caresses in that chamber. My joy would have been complete had not the fear of discovery a little daunted me, and torn the heart from the heart of my dear mistress.

"At last the dreaded day fell upon us. One morning the girl's father came early to his daughter's room and saw that the moonbeam freshness of her beauty had declined, as it were from some deep fatigue. He called his queen to him, saying: 'Why has our daughter's colour changed? Do you not see that the deadly wind of Autumn has withered her roses?' Her mother looked long, in a suspicious silence, at the sleeping child and then, with a woman's prescience, knew at once what had happened. Stricken with fear and rage she sought to prove or refute her suspicions and found, to her horror, that her intuition had been all too true.''

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-eighteenth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

''THE QUEEN STAGGERED in her emotion, and cried: 'Her shame, her honour have been pillaged! O vile and calmly-sleeping girl! O stains upon the garment of her chastity!' Then she shook her daughter furiously, screaming: 'If you do not tell the truth, you bitch, I have a red death for you!'

''The girl woke with a start and, seeing her mother's nose filled with black hatred, confusedly realised that the worst had happened. Instead of confession or denial, she lowered her lids and remained silent. From time to time she would lift timid and astonished eyes to her mother's wrath, but, as for answering one way or another, that she refused to do. When the queen felt her voice grow hoarse and her throat refuse its office, she went out in a tumult and instituted a search throughout the palace for the author of this harm. Very soon the slaves ran me to earth, for they traced me by my human smell, which was different from theirs.

''They seized me and dragged me outside the palace; they piled together a great quantity of wood and threw me naked upon it; but, at that moment, the two old women of the cistern appeared, and said to the soldiers: 'We are going to pour this jar of inflammable oil on his vile body, so that he may burn the better and the more quickly.' The soldiers gave ready permission, and my two deliverers rubbed every part of my body with the miraculous oil of Pharaoh's serpents. Then the soldiers lifted me back on to the pyre and set fire to it. In a moment I was surrounded by furious flames, but their red tongues were sweeter and cooler in licking me than streams in the gardens of Iram. From morning to night I lay in the belly of the furnace, as safe as if it had been my mother's womb.

"The Jinn of the First Bed, who had piled fuel on the fire all day, went at sunset to ask their master what they should do with my charred bones, and he bade them collect them and burn them again. 'But all of you spit on them first,' added the queen; so the servants extinguished the fire in order to spit on my bones, and found me laughing and intact within.

"The king and the queen were forced to pay astonished tribute to my power; after reflection, they became eager to marry their daughter to so eminent a person. They took me by the hand and excused their treatment of me; when they heard that I was the son of the king of Wakak, they rejoiced exceedingly that Allah permitted a union between a princess of their line and the noblest of the sons of men. Thus it was that I married this body of a rose in all magnificence.

"When I expressed a desire to return to my kingdom, my father-in-law gave unwilling permission and, after loading me with presents of jewels, prepared for my journey a gold car drawn by six pair of flying Jinn. After sorrowful leave-taking, my bride and I were transported in the twinkling of an eye to my city of Wakak.

"The girl whom you have seen, O youth, with her hands tied behind her back, is none other than my queen, Fircone, daughter of the king of the Jinn of the First Bed. About her lies the explanation which you demand.

"One night, soon after my return, I lay sleeping beside my wife and, contrary to my usual custom, woke because of the heat. Yet I noticed that, in spite of the stifling weather, Fircone's feet and hands were colder than snow. In a panic lest she were seriously ill, I roused her gently, saying: 'My charming, your body is frozen! Are you sure that you do not suffer?' 'It is nothing,' she answered indifferently, 'I went out to satisfy a need just now, and my consequent ablution has left me cold.' On that occasion I thought that she was speaking the truth, and lay down again.

"A few nights afterward, the same thing happened and Fircone gave the same explanation. But this time I was not satisfied, and felt vague suspicions penetrate my soul. But though, thereafter, I was troubled, I took care to close the coffer of my heart upon my doubts and place the lock of silence upon the door of speech."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-nineteenth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

"AS A CURE for my foreboding, I went one morning to look at the handsome horses in my stable, and, to my consternation, saw that my own private chargers, erewhile swifter than the wind, had become thin and worn, with bones piercing their hides, and their backs galled in many places. I called the grooms into my presence, and said: 'O sons of dogs, what is the meaning of this?' They threw themselves on their faces before my wrath, and one of them a little lifted his trembling head to say: 'O our master, if you will spare my life, I can tell you something in secret.' I threw him the kerchief of security, bidding him at the same time hide nothing if he wished to escape the impaling stake. Then he said: 'Every night without fail the queen our mistress comes to the stable, dressed in royal garments, with jewels and tires upon her, like Balkis who loved Sulayman; she chooses one of our master's own coursers, and rides him away. When she returns before dawn, the horse is good for nothing and can only fall upon his straw. We have not dared to tell our king of this!'

"My heart was troubled at this news; suddenly all my floating suspicions had taken firm root. The day passed, and not for one hour did I find the calm necessary to sit in judgment upon the affairs of my kingdom. My legs and arms stretched with impatience towards the night, until at last it came. I went to my wife at my usual hour and found her already undressed and yawning. 'See how heavy are my eyes with sleep,' she said, 'I wish nothing but rest tonight. Ah, let us sleep!' I pretended to be even more weary than she and, fighting down the trouble of my mind, lay out beside her and snored like men in a tavern, to make her think I slept.

"The ill-omened girl rose up as quietly as a kitten, and spilled the contents of a cup between my open lips. It was with difficulty that I did not betray myself. I turned a little to the wall, as if still in my sleep, and spat the liquid banj noiselessly into the pillow. But Fircone was so certain of the drug's effect that she came and went openly in the room; she washed and cared for herself, she was prodigal of kohl upon her eyes, nard in her hair, Indian sumar upon her brows, Indian missi for her teeth, jewels and volatile essence of roses over all her body. When she had gone forth, drunken with the wine of some expectation, I rose and, throwing a hooded cloak about my shoulders, followed her softly upon my naked feet. I saw her go to the stable and ride off upon a horse as handsome and light as the courser of Shirin. Fearing that the noise of pursuing hoofs would give her warning, I was constrained to gird up my garment in my belt, in the manner of grooms and messengers, and run with all the speed of my body after the fugitive. When I tripped and fell, I fearlessly rose again, and, when the pebbles of the road cut my feet, I took no heed.

"Now I must tell you that the greyhound, which you have already seen, followed me unbidden and ran faithfully beside me without once giving tongue.

"After many hours of this cruel travel, my wife came to a naked plain, holding only a low mud-walled house such as negroes use. She dismounted and entered; but when I would have followed her, the door was shut, and I had to content myself with looking through a window. Inside were seven great black men, looking like buffaloes. They greeted my queen with terrible oaths and, throwing her upon the ground, beat her so soundly that I thought her tender bones would have broken. But, though she bears the marks of those blows upon her back and belly to this day, she seemed not to care for them, and said presently to the negroes: 'O my dears, I swear, by the ardour of my love for you, that I am only late tonight because my king, that scab, that evil doer, stayed awake longer than usual. Do you think, otherwise, I would have wasted a minute before running to the wine of our coming together?'

"I thought that I was a prey to some horrible dream; I heard myself saying: 'By Allah, I have never beaten her even with a rose!' Meanwhile the black men stripped my wife naked, tearing her royal clothes and snatching away her jewels. Then they fell upon her as one man and belaboured her most cruelly, while she answered their violence with sighs, ecstatic eyes. . . .

"Not being able to control myself any longer, I burst through the window into that room and snatched up one of the vile dogs' own bludgeons. I threw myself upon the swarm of lechers, while they still thought that I was some avenging Jinni, and sent five of them straight to a deep hell even upon the body of my wife. The two others pulled themselves loose and would have fled but I was able to reach one and stretch him unconscious at my feet. When, however, I leaned over him to bind his wrists and feet because he was not dead, my wife pushed me so violently from behind that I fell to the floor. The negro took advantage of this intervention to rise and perch upon my chest. He had already lifted his cudgel to make an end of me, when my faithful greyhound seized him by the throat and rolled him over and over upon the dry mud. I fell upon him and bound his arms and legs; then, and still in raging silence, I fastened Fircone in the same way.

"Leaving the bodies in the house, I dragged the negro outside and lashed him to the tail of my horse; then I mounted and, slinging my queen in front of me like a bundle, rode off with the faithful dog running at my stirrup.

"When I reached my palace, I cut off the negro's head with my own hand and fed his body, which was already a quivering rag because of his journey, to the good greyhound. I had the head salted, and it is my wife's punishment every day to look at it and to eat, if she must eat, the rest of the dog's food.

"The seventh negro, who had succeeded in escaping, ceased not his flight until he came to the lands of Sin and Masin, to the court of Qamus bin Tammuz, and, by a series of typical machinations, found asylum beneath the Princes Mohra's ivory bed. He is now her intimate counsellor, and no one knows of his presence in the palace.

"Such, O youth, is the whole story of Fircone, and of the presence of a black man beneath that young assassin's ivory bed."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-twentieth Night
Had Come

She said:

Thus spake King Cypress, master of the city of Wakak, to young Prince Diamond. Then he added: "And now that you have heard that which no other living person knows beside myself, stretch forth your head, for it is no longer yours, and wash your hands of life."

But Diamond answered: "O king of time, I know that my head is between your hands, and I am ready to lose it without too great regret. But at present the most important point of your story seems to have been left out, and I do know not why the seventh negro hid himself under Princess Mohra's bed when he had all the world from which to choose, and especially I do not know why the princess lets him stay there. Explain these mysteries and then I shall be willing to make my ablution and to die."

King Cypress was prodigiously astonished by this request, for he had not expected such a question and had never had the curiosity to go into these details. Rather than appear ignorant upon so vital a matter, he said: "O traveller, those things which you wish to know are a state secret and their revelation would be fatal to myself and my kingdom. Rather than answer you, I prefer to grant you your life and pardon your indiscretion. Now be gone from my palace before I change my mind!"

Prince Diamond, who had never thought to get off so easily, kissed the earth between the king's hands and left the palace, hugging the answer to his riddle and giving thanks to Allah for his safety. He took leave of his friend Farah, who wept to let him go, and, mounting upon the terrace of the fair boy's house, burnt one of the Simurg's hairs. Immediately a tempest blew and the Father of Flight appeared before him. When he had expressed the desire, his good friend took him up and, after carrying him safely across the seven oceans, cordially received him in his own palace.

He made him rest for a few days and then transported him to the dwelling of the delicious Aziza, among the rose trees rhyming with their roses. He found her weeping for his absence and sighing for his return, her cheeks changed to pomegranate flowers.

When they entered, she rose trembling, a calling hind; and the Flying Simurg had the thought to leave the hall. When he returned in an hour's time, he found them still laced, splendour upon splendour.

"O our benefactor, O father and crown of giants," said Prince Diamond, "I wish you to carry us to your charming niece, Gamila, for she waits me on the red coals of desire." The excellent Simurg took them both up and, in the twinkling of an eye, set them down where they could find the gentle Gamila, lost in sadness, having no news of her body, and still saying over these lines:

Far from the eyes which the narcissus loves
Cast not my heart;
Mock not the crying of the drunkards,
Lead them back to the tavern.

The armies of his boy's beard
Compass my heart,
And, as a wounded rose,
The rent in my robe shall not be sewn.

O brown tyrannous beauty,
My heart lies at your feet of jasmin,
My heart of a little girl at your thief's feet.

Diamond had not forgotten that he owed to this child deliverance from her sister Latifa and the magic arms which had served him so well. After the first rapture of greeting, he prayed Aziza to leave him alone with his preserver for an hour, and Aziza, considering that the request was just, went out with the Simurg. When they returned in an hour, Gamila still lay in her lover's arms.

Then Diamond, who loved method in all things, turned to his two wives and the Simurg, saying: "I think that the time has come to cry quits with Latifa." "It is permitted!" they answered with one voice. The Simurg hastened through the air and speedily returned, bearing his iniquitous niece, with her arms tied behind her back. The four sat round her in a circle to judge her, and the giant gave his opinion first. "The human race should certainly be rid of this foul creature," he said, "I suggest that we hang her upside down, impale her, and finally feed her to the vultures." But Queen Aziza, when Diamond asked her, said: "I think that it would be best to forget the harm which she did to our husband and, in the joy of our marriages, pardon her." Gamila also counselled that her sister should be forgiven, on condition that she restored to their human shapes all the youths whom she had changed into deer. So Diamond threw her the kerchief of his safety, saying: "I pardon her, and must now request to be left alone with her for an hour." The other three withdrew and, when they returned, found Latifa both pardoned and content in Diamond's arms.

When the sorceress had given back humanity to the princes and other noble young men whom she had changed into deer, and had dismissed them with suitable food and raiment, the Simurg took Diamond and his three wives on his back and brought them to the city of Qamus bin Tammuz, father of Princess Mohra. He pitched tents for them outside the city and left them there to rest, while he himself visited the harem of the palace, at Diamond's suggestion, and sought out Coral-Branch. As soon as she heard of the return of the youth for whom she had sorrowfully waited, she allowed the Simurg to carry her to the prince's tent and, leading forth the three other brides, to leave her alone with him. After the first ardours of greeting, Diamond proved to Coral-Branch that he had not forgotten, and spoke to her in so fitting a language that she shone beautiful indeed in her contentment, and quite won the hearts of the three other girls when they returned.

As soon as Diamond had regulated the private affairs of his four wives, he set himself to the principal object of his quest. Leaving the tents, he made his way alone to the square before the palace, above which the crowned and the uncrowned heads moved in the wind, and beat loudly upon the jewelled drum, to signify that he was ready to answer Princess Mohra's question.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-twenty-first Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

GUARDS CAME AND led him into the presence of King Qamus, who at once recognised the charming youth to whom he had counselled a reflection of three days. "Allah protect you, my son!" he said, "Do you still persist in your wish to sound the fantastic mysteries of a girl's brain?" "Knowledge and divination come to us from Allah," answered Diamond, "Not ours the pride! Your daughter has a secret in the coffer of her heart, but the key is with me alone." "Alas, for your youth!" cried the king, "The day has come for you to wash your hands of life."

As he had no hope of turning the young prince from his deadly purpose, he ordered his slaves to announce to Princess Mohra that a royal stranger was ready to unravel the weavings of her fantasy.

Soon she came into the hall, Mohra the happy, the fatality of young lives; the eye could no more help regarding her than a man with the dropsy may refrain from drinking of the Euphrates; a thousand souls had died for her, like butterflies in the fire; and her coming was heralded by the odour of her curls. At the first glance she recognised the glorious santon of her garden, whose coming had so disturbed her heart; her astonishment gave place to rage when she remembered how he had secretly stolen away. "This time he shall not escape me," she muttered, as she sat down on the bed of the throne and regarded Prince Diamond with stormy eyes. "All know the question!" she cried, "What is the relation between Fircone and Cypress?" "All know the answer!" retorted Diamond, "The relation is bad; for Fircone, the wife of Cypress, King of the city of Wakak, is even now punished for a great wrong, and there are negroes in the matter."

Princess Mohra felt afraid, and her cheeks turned yellow; yet she fought down her disquiet, and said: "There is nothing definite in your words. When you have explained, I shall know that you are lying."

Seeing that the princess would not take his hint, Diamond said plainly: "If you wish me to enter into details and lift the curtain from a thing rightly hidden, tell me first how you have learnt such things, for a young virgin should know nothing of them. It seems evident that you have someone here whose coming was a calamity to all those other princes." Without giving her time to reply, he turned to the king, and continued: "O king of time, it is not right that you should be kept any longer in ignorance of the mystery which surrounds your honourable daughter; I conjure you to press my question for me." So the king signed with his eyes that the beautiful child should speak, but she would not.

Then Prince Diamond took King Qamus by the hand and silently led him to Mohra's chamber. With a quick movement he stooped and pulled away the ivory bed. The flask of the princess's secret was shattered upon the stone of discovery, and the crisped head of the negro showed to the eyes of all. Qamus and those who were with him lowered their heads for shame and felt the sweat start out on their bodies. The old king would probe no further, lest the stain upon his honour, should grow with explanation. Therefore he handed Mohra to the prince to dispose of as he thought fit, saying: "I only require that you take her away as quickly as possible, my son, so that my ears may not hear her speak, and my eyes not suffer the torment of her presence." But the negro was impaled.

Prince Diamond had the confused princess bound hand and foot, and taken out to his tent. Then he begged the Simurg to carry them all as quickly as possible to the city of Shams-Shah. The excellent giant obeyed in the twinkling of an eye and, when he had set down his young friend and the five women outside the gate, swelled up and floated on his way without waiting for thanks. So much for him.

When King Shams-Shah learned of the approach of his dear son, the night of grief turned for him to the morning of joy, and the fountains of his eyes were stanched. While the good news ran about the city and happiness flamed up in all the houses, he went forth to meet the prince and took him to his breast, kissing him upon the mouth and eyes, and weeping and giving little cries of satisfaction. With his joined hands, Diamond strove to check his father's sighs and tears; when the first emotion of the two men was a little calmed, and the old king could speak, he said to his son: "O eye and lamp of your father's house, tell me quickly each detail of your journey, that the recital of every day may bring a balm to the grief which I felt upon that day."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-twenty-second Night
Had Come

She said:

Prince Diamond told the old king the story of his adventures, but nothing would be gained by repeating it in this place. Then he presented his four wives, one by one, and finally pointed to the bound princess, saying: "It is for you, O my father, to fix the fate of this woman."

The wise Shams-Shah divined that his son had a hidden love for the girl, since he had undertaken toil and danger to win her, though she had destroyed countless youths before him. Therefore, considering he would grieve the prince if his judgment were too harsh, he said: "He who, by great trouble and difficulty, has become possessed of an inestimable pearl, should be in no hurry to cast it aside. A blind fantasy has led this princess into reprehensible actions, but it will be charitable to suppose that Allah willed it so.

Many young men have died for her, but they could not have died had not such a fate been written in their destinies. Remember too, my son, that this girl treated you with kindness and reverence when you entered her garden. Finally, and most important, it is known that no hand of desire, either black or of any other colour, has touched the youthful fruit of her being; no man has savoured the apple of her chin or the pomegranate of her lips.''

As his four joyful and exquisite wives lent weight to his father's counsel, Prince Diamond chose an auspicious day and hour, and joined the bright sun of his body to this wild moon. His five wives bore him marvellous children who were as favoured as their father, Diamond the Splendid, and their grandfather, Shams-Shah the Magnificent; like these they held fortune and happiness as slaves.

Such is the extraordinary tale of Prince Diamond. Glory and praise to those who have preserved the stories of old to be an edification to such modern ears as have the wit to seek for wisdom!

King Shahryar, who had listened with very great attention, for the first time thanked Shahrazade, saying: ''Praise, praise, O honey mouth! You have made me forget my bitter preoccupation.'' But soon his face grew dark again, and Shahrazade hastened to answer: ''O king of time, this tale is nothing to certain things which I could tell you of the Master of Shifts and Laughter.'' ''What master of what shifts, O Shahrazade?'' cried King Shahryar, and Shahrazade said:

SOME JESTS & SUGGESTIONS OF THE MASTER OF SHIFTS AND LAUGHTER

It is related, O auspicious king, in the old annals of the wise, and it is also handed down to us by tradition, that there was once in the city of Cairo, that home of witty chatter, a silly looking fellow who hid, beneath an extravagant buffoonery, an endless fund of intelligence and true learning. He was the most amusing, the best instructed, and the most ironical man of his time. His name was Goha and his trade was just nothing at all, though he would on occasion take the place of a teacher in the mosques.

One day his friends said to him: "O Goha, are you not ashamed to pass your life in idleness, and work your ten fingers only in raising food to your mouth? Do you not think it high time that you left this vagabonding existence and conformed to the customs of other men?" Goha answered nothing; but, one day, when he had caught a large and handsome stork, with magnificent wings to fly beyond the sunset, a beak which was the terror of the birds, and legs like lily stems, he took it up upon the terrace of his house and, in the presence of those who had reproached him, cut off its wings and beak and legs with a sharp knife. Then he kicked it into space, bidding it fly. "Allah curse you!" cried his scandalised friends, "What is the meaning of this cruel folly?" "The stork wearied me," answered Goha, "He weighed upon my sight, because he was different. Now I have made him conform to the customs of other men."

On another occasion Goha said to a certain company: "O Mussulmans, do you know why Allah gave no wings to the camel and the elephant?" "We do not, O Goha," answered his hearers, "but you, from whom no secrets of science are hidden, can surely tell us." "If the camel and the elephant had wings," explained Goha, "they would perch on the flowers in your garden and, being very heavy, crush them to the earth."

Once a friend knocked at Goha's door, saying: "O Goha, for friendship's sake lend me your ass, for I have to go upon a sudden journey." "I would willingly have done so, but alas, I have sold him," answered Goha, who had no great confidence in the man's integrity. At that moment the ass set up an interminable braying from the stable and the friend cried: "But your ass is here!" In a voice of deep offence, Goha replied: "If you would take the word of an ass before that of a wise man, you are a fool and I do not wish to see you again."

One evening Goha went by invitation to eat at a neighbour's house. A fowl was set before them, but after a few attempts at mastication Goha was obliged to leave his portion, for the bird was one of the oldest of its kind and its flesh was leather. He supped a little of the broth in which it had been cooked and then, arranging the fowl with its head towards Mecca, began to say his prayer above it. "O blasphemy!" cried his host, "To say your prayer over a fowl!" But Goha answered: "O uncle, you are mistaken; though this thing has the appearance of a fowl, it is, in reality, a very old and saintly woman, one who went down into the fire and the fire respected her."

Again Goha made one with a caravan which was travelling on short rations. His belly was ever as large and desirous as that of a camel, but, when they all sat down to eat at the first stopping place, he hung back with great discretion and reserve. Knowing his usual appetite, his wondering companions pressed him to take the roll and hard boiled egg which was his share, but he replied: "No, no, in Allah's name, eat and be content! But, if you really insist upon my picking something, let each give me half his roll and half his egg, for my stomach could never compass the whole of either."

Goha went one day to the butcher, and said: "There is to be a festival in our house, so give me some of the best end of fat mutton." The butcher gave him a fillet of considerable weight, which he carried to his wife with a request that she should make *kababs,* seasoned to his taste with onions. Then he went out for a walk in the market.

As soon as his back was turned, his wife hastened to cook the mutton and to eat every scrap of it with the help of her brother. When Goha returned, his stomach watered at the good smell of cooking, but his wife only set before him some mouldy bread and a morsel of Greek cheese. When he asked after the *kababs,* she said: "The mercy of Allah be upon you and upon the *kababs!* The cat ate them all while I was in the privy." Goha rose without a word and, seizing the cat, weighed it in the kitchen scales. Finding that it was not near as heavy as the meat which he had brought, he returned to his wife, crying: "Foul daughter of a thousand dogs, if this is the weight of the meat, where is the cat? If this is the weight of the cat, where is the meat?"

On one occasion, when his wife needed to do some cooking, she handed their little three months' son to Goha, saying: "O father of Abdalla, nurse the child, and, when I have finished with the cookpots, I will take him again." Goha, though he hated this kind of business, lifted the little boy; but, even at that moment, the child wet all over his father's new caftan. At once Goha sat him on the ground and, in his fury, began to spit all over him. "What are you doing on the child, O pitch-face?" screamed his wife. "Are you blind?" he answered, "Do you not see that he is our own dear little son and that I am spitting on him? As Allah lives, if he had been anyone else's son, I might have turned my back."

One evening Goha's friends said to him: "O Goha, as you know all about astronomy, will you tell us what happens to the moon when it has passed its last quarter?" "Were you taught nothing at school?" cried Goha, "When the moon has passed its last quarter, Allah breaks it up to make stars."

Goha called one day on a neighbour and begged him for the loan of a stewpot in which to cook a sheep's head.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-twenty-third Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

THE NEIGHBOUR LENT the stewpot and Goha returned it on the following morning with a second and smaller stewpot inside. When the owner expressed astonishment, Goha told him that his stewpot must have borne a child during the night. So the neighbour thanked him, and arranged the stewpot and her daughter on the same shelf.

Later in the day Goha returned and asked if he might borrow the two stewpots. "With all my heart," answered the other, as he handed the vessel to Goha with the little one.

When many days passed without a return of the stewpots, the neighbour went to ask for them, saying: "I have no lack of confidence in you, O Goha, but today I need the vessel for myself." "What vessel, dear neighbour?" asked Goha. "The stewpot which I lent you and which had a child," replied the other. Then cried Goha: "Allah have her in His compassion! She is dead!" And, when the neighbour asked him how, in Allah's name, a stewpot could die, Goha explained: "All which is born and all which bears must die. We come from Allah and to Him we return at the last!"

A fellah gave Goha a fat fowl, and Goha asked the man to share it with him. They ate the bird and were content; but soon another peasant knocked at the door and demanded entertainment. "You are welcome, but who are you?" was Goha's greeting; and the man replied: "I am the neighbour of him who gave you the fowl." "Be it upon my head and before my eyes!" cried Goha, and so cordially fed the stranger that he departed in great good humour. A few days afterwards another peasant knocked at the door and, when Goha asked who was there, explained that he was the friend of the friend of the giver of the fowl. "It is permitted," said Goha as he led the man in and set him down before the cloth. He retired to the kitchen and returned with a bowl containing warm water, on whose surface floated a few little drops of grease. Seeing that there was no more to follow, the peasant asked: "What is this, my host?" and Goha answered: "This? The sister of the sister of the water in which the fowl was boiled."

Certain of Goha's friends wished to play a trick on him, so they secretly provided themselves with eggs and invited him to go to the hammam with them. When they were all undressed and had entered the sweat hall, their spokesman cried: "Now let each of us lay an egg, and he who cannot lay shall pay for the baths of all the rest." At once the whole troop, except Goha, squatted down, cackling as well as they could, and, after a certain time, each produced an egg from underneath him. Immediately Goha began strutting about with jerky high steps and, crowing like a cock, threw himself upon his friends and began to assault them. "What are you doing, vile libertine?" they cried, and Goha answered: "As I seem to be the only cock among so many hens, surely I must do my kind!"

It is related that Goha used to stand every morning at the door of his house and make this prayer to Allah: "O Lord, send me a hundred dinars, for I need exactly a hundred. If the gift passes or falls short even by one dinar, I cannot accept it."

A certain neighbour, a Jew who had become evilly rich,—may he roast in the fires of the fifth Hell!—heard his loud daily prayer and thought to himself: "By the life of Abraham and Jacob, I will try this fellow!" He made up a purse of ninety-nine gold dinars and threw it from the window at the feet of Goha as he prayed. Goha picked up the purse and, after counting its contents, lifted his hands on high, crying: "O generous Giver, I render praise and thanks and glory! But the sum is not complete and I cannot accept it. I will give it to my poor neighbour the Jew, for he is a model of honesty and has many children." So saying, he cast the purse through the Jew's door and went on his way.

"By the luminous horns of Moses," cried the astonished Jew, "this is a good man! But I have not tested him on the second point of his prayer." Next morning he put a hundred and one dinars into a purse and threw them at Goha's feet as he prayed. Feigning to believe that this gift also came from Allah, Goha counted the money, and then cried, with his eyes lifted to heaven: "O Father of a limitless generosity, I accept Your Gift."

He slipped the purse into his breast and walked away, but the Jew, in a white heat of passion, soon overtook him. "Give me the purse, give me the purse!" he cried; but Goha answered: "Do you think that I should give you every purse which Allah sends me? Your share this morning is one dinar, dog of a Jew." He gave the unbeliever one of the new coins and turned on his heel, exclaiming: "Now I know what they mean when they speak of the uncounted blessings of Allah."

One day Goha listened to a preacher in a mosque and the preacher said, in explanation of a point of canon law: "O Believers, if a husband does his duty at nightfall, it is equal to the sacrifice of a sheep. Lawful embracing during the day is equal in Allah's sight to the freeing of a slave. And if the thing be done in the middle of the night the grace obtained is equal to the sacrifice of a camel."

When he returned home, Goha reported this saying to his wife and then lay down by her side to sleep. But the woman, having been impressed by the sermon, nudged him, saying: "Rise up now, O man, and sacrifice a sheep!" "Very well," answered Goha and he laid aside his sleep and did her bidding. Towards the middle of the night the woman could not sleep and roused Goha from his slumber and whispered to him: "Let us sacrifice a camel."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-twenty-fourth Night
Had Come

She said:

Goha rose yawning and, with half-shut eyes, did what was required of him; then he fell into a deep sleep. But as soon as the sun rose his wife plucked him by the arm, saying: "See, see, it is day! Let us free a slave!" "Certainly," answered Goha as he shut his eyes again, "but let charity begin at home."

Another day, at another mosque, Goha heard the Imam say: "O Believers, O you who forsake your wives and run after the charms of boys, let it be known to you that each time one of the Faithful accomplishes the act of husbandry with his wife, Allah builds for him a shelter in Paradise." Goha returned home and told his wife what had been said; and, though her husband thought no more of the matter, the woman remembered. When the children had been put to bed, she said eagerly: 'Let us so work that a shelter may be prepared for our children in Paradise." "It is permitted," answered Goha and he dug his trowel into the mortar box. Then he went to sleep.

An hour afterwards his wife woke him, saying: "I forgot that one of our daughters is to be married and must therefore live alone. Let us prepare for her a shelter in Paradise." "If you insist on sacrificing the son for the daughter . . ." answered Goha, and he did what was needful for the future of his daughter. Then he lay down again, breathing rather fast, and fell into deep slumber. In the middle of the night his wife pulled him by the foot, demanding that a shelter should be prepared for her mother in Paradise; but Goha cried: "My good woman, we will none of us ever get to Paradise, if we keep the Almighty so busy building shelters."

A certain woman who lived near Goha's house was praying one day when she accidentally let a fart. She was so new to this exercise that she could not be sure whether she had actually done the thing, or whether she had scraped her foot along the tiles, or made some fervent noise in praying; so she went to consult Goha, who was famous for his knowledge of the law. His answer, when she had explained her difficulty, was to let a rather large fart and ask: "Was it like that, good aunt?" "It was louder than that," insisted the pious old woman. Goha let a much louder fart, and asked: "Was it like that?" "It was louder," she replied. Then cried Goha: "As Allah lives, the law takes cognisance of breaking wind but not of breaking tempests. Go in peace, O Mother of Airs, for if I try to rival you I may blow up."

One day the conquering awe-inspiring Tamourleng, the lame man of iron, passed near the city where Goha lived, and the frightened inhabitants, after a thousand confabulations concerning the safety of the city, agreed to beg Goha to deliver them. He sent at once for all the muslin in all the shops of that place and rolled a turban as great as a chariot wheel about his head. Then he mounted his ass and went forth to meet the terrible invader. "What is this turban?" asked the Tatar chief, and Goha replied: "Turban, O sovereign of the world? This is my nightcap. I beg a humble pardon for coming out to meet you in my nightcap, but the cart and the oxen which carry my turban were not ready.'' Judging the people by their turbans, Tamourleng left that city in peace, but for friendship's sake he kept Goha by him, and asked him who he was. ''I am the earth god,'' answered Goha; so the Tamour, who like all men of his race was surrounded by many little boys with small and slanting eyes, showed them to Goha, saying: ''Well, earth god, what do you think of these delightful children? Have you ever seen their equal in beauty?'' ''O sovereign of the world, I find their eyes too small and their faces rather plain,'' replied Goha, ''I say it, not to displease you, but because you asked.'' ''The matter is of little importance,'' laughed Tamour, ''for, if you are the earth god, you can enlarge their eyes to please me.'' Then said Goha: ''My lord, the eyes in the head belong to Allah and only He can change them; being the earth god, I can do nothing but enlarge the eye which each has below his waist.'' Tamourleng rejoiced at this reply and retained Goha in his service, to be his jester.

One day Tamour, who not only limped upon an iron foot, but was also one-eyed and extremely ugly, was talking with Goha and having his head shaved by the royal barber at the same time. When the man handed him a mirror, Tamour looked in it and wept. Goha also burst into tears. When the two had groaned and sobbed for three hours, Tamour made an end, but Goha went on with his lamentation. ''What is the matter?'' said the astonished chief, ''I wept because I saw my surprising ugliness in the glass; but I have stopped now, while you, who had no cause for tears, are still continuing.'' ''If I may say so with all respect, O sovereign of the world,'' answered Goha, ''if you weep for three hours after one glance at your ugliness in the mirror, is it surprising that your slave, who has to look upon the same thing all day, should weep for even longer?" Instead of flying into a rage, Tamour laughed so heartily that he fell over on his backside.

When they sat at meat on another occasion, Tamour gurked near Goha's face, and the jester cried: "My lord, you are not very polite." "We have no feeling against it in our country," answered the astonished Tamour. Goha said nothing, but, when the meal was finished, let a sounding fart. Tamour was scandalised, and cried: "Are you not ashamed, O son of a dog?" Then said Goha: "Pardon, dear master, but I thought you did not understand our language."

One day Goha consented to take the place of the Imam in the mosque of a neighbouring village. When he had finished preaching, he scratched his head and remarked to his congregation: "O Mussulmans, it is astonishing that the climate of your village and mine should be identical." "How so?" they asked, and he replied: "I have been feeling my belly, and I find it all slack and hanging empty, just as it does at home. The name of Allah be upon you all!"

Preaching at another mosque, Goha raised his hand to the sky and thus concluded: "We thank You and glorify You, O living and all powerful God, that you did not see fit to situate our behind in our hands!" "Surely this is strange praise!" ventured some of the congregation, but Goha answered: "And yet praiseworthy, for if He had placed our behinds in our hands, think how dirty our noses would have been."

As he was preaching on another occasion, Goha said: "O Mussulmans, let us give thanks to Allah that he did not put the front behind!" When they asked him to explain, he answered: "If He had placed us like that, think how easily we might have fallen into the sin of Lot!"

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-twenty-fifth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

ONE DAY, WHEN Goha's wife was alone and naked in her room she began to think pleasurably on certain matters and, apostrophising, said: "My precious, why are you not twins, or even triplets, that my joy might be twice or thrice as great?" Goha, who entered at this moment and heard the words, revealed himself and, with tears in his eyes, began to curse aloud, saying: "O dog, O wanton, O cause of all my woes, why are there any of you?"

Goha once went into his neighbour's vineyard and began to eat grapes like a fox, pulling down the clusters, crushing them in his mouth, and then letting the bare stems spring upwards. While he was thus engaged, the owner of the vineyard ran up, brandishing a stick, and cried: "What are you doing here, O thief?" "I had a colic," answered Goha, "and came here to relieve my belly." "If that is so," retorted the other, "where is what you have done?" Goha was at first nonplussed, but, when his roving eye caught sight of some ass's dung, he pointed to it, and cried: "There!" "You lie!" exclaimed the man, "How long have you been an ass?" Goha pulled a long face and answered: "Ever since I married my wife and did not divorce her." The owner laughed at his quick wit and let him go free.

Goha was walking beside the river one day when a crowd of washerwomen swarmed about him like bees, and one of them, lifted her garment, in revealing fashion. Goha turned away his head, saying: "O Protector of modesty, I take refuge in Your grace!" "What is wrong with you, O sounding brass?" asked the offended washerwoman, "are you so timid that a mere glance will slay you?" Goha answered: "Single glances at the Runlet of Calamity have ruined many a man." "Not at all, not at all," cried the washerwomen. "There is no harm in such things and as for your runlet of calamity, everyone knows it is the Poor Man's Paradise." Goha walked a little apart from the angry washerwomen and, finding a stick on the ground, removed his turban and enveloped the stick in it as though in a winding sheet. Carrying the shrouded stick in his hand he returned to the washerwomen with slow tread and downcast eyes. They crowded about him curiously and clamoured at him as to what the thing might be. Goha answered: "This is a poor man who died, my sisters. He wishes to be received into Paradise." The women laughed loudly at this joke and allowed Goha to continue his walk along the river bank in peace.

One day, when Goha was on a visit to his sister-in-law, the woman asked him to mind her baby while she went to the hamman. As soon as she had gone, the little one began to mule and pule with all his strength. Goha, having a natural need, fulfilled it and during this time the child quieted down and went to sleep. When the mother returned and found her bantling in a calm slumber, she thanked Goha for his care, but he replied: "That is nothing at all, nothing at all. If you had but seen my sleeping draught you would have fallen head over heels at once."

One morning, while Goha's ass was attending to its need at the door of a lonely mosque, a worshipper came forth and, seeing this action, spat disgustedly upon the ground. Goha looked at him out of the corner of his eye, and cried: "If I had not important business in hand, I would teach you to stop your dirty tricks!"

One another occasion, as Goha lay in the road in the heat of the sun, scantily attired and revealing his nakedness, a passing stranger cried to him: "What are you doing, O shameful?" "I see nothing shameful," answered Goha, "in a man of parts, as myself, taking a little fresh air and sunshine."

During a legal consultation, Goha was asked what the congregation should do if an Imam let a fart in the mosque. "Give him the usual responses," answered Goha.

One day, as Goha and his wife walked along the banks of the rising river, the woman slipped and fell in. As she was being borne down by the current, Goha bravely threw himself into the river and began to swim with all his might upstream. People on the bank called to him to know what he was looking for, and he answered: "By Allah, I am looking for my wife. She has fallen in." "But the current is bearing her fast downstream, O Goha," they cried. "That shows all you know about my wife," he spluttered, "A contrary creature like that will be at the source by this time."

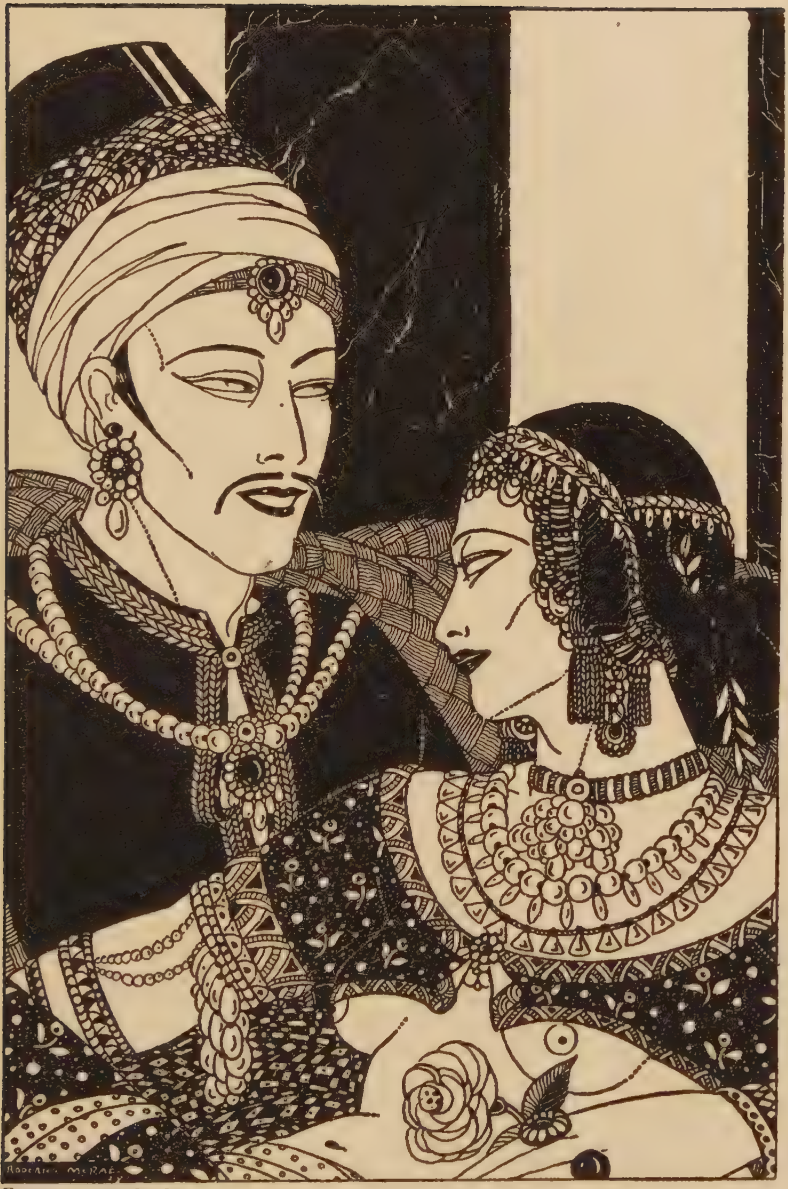
During the time when Goha acted as kadi, a man was brought before him who had been caught in sodomy in the open street. "How did you do it?" asked Goha, "Perhaps if you tell the whole truth, I will acquit you." The man answered in some detail, concluding his recital by saying: "Then, O our master the kadi, the first having been successful I was sinful enough to begin again. I confess my fault, O kadi.'' Goha heard him through without interruption, but when he had finished his confession, leaned forward and said in a thunderous voice: ''Take this lying braggart and give him a good beating. I have seen the thing tried thirty times and never once with success.''

During a visit which Goha paid to the kadi of a certain city, two litigants presented themselves before his host, saying: ''O our lord the kadi, we are neighbours and our houses actually touch. Last night a dog came and dropped a turd exactly half way between our two doors. We wish to know whose business it is to clean it up.'' The kadi turned to Goha and said ironically: ''I leave you to give judgment in this suit; it seems worthy of you.'' ''Is the turd not at all nearer to your door, O man?'' asked Goha of the first. ''It is exactly between the two,'' answered the man. ''Are you sure the turd is not a little nearer your door?'' asked Goha of the second. ''I cannot lie, it stays in the road exactly half way between our doors,'' answered the man. ''I have heard and now I give judgment!'' proclaimed Goha, ''The onus of clearing away does not lie with either of you but with him whose duty is order in the public streets. Let the kadi see to it!''

Goha's son, a little lad four years old, was once given a fine artichoke at a feast. ''What is that pretty thing?'' asked the giver, and the child answered: ''A tiny calf which has not opened his eyes.''

Once, when Goha felt lazy and desirous, he lay in the garden and a honey-bee came and perched right on top of him.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.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"Heart's Miracle, Lieutenant of the Birds"

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-twenty-sixth Night
Had Come

She said:

Goha swelled with pride, and exclaimed: "As Allah lives, you know what is good, O bee! You have found the best honey maker in all the garden."

"These, O auspicious king," continued Shahrazade, "are only a few of the jests and suggestions of that master of shifts and laughter, the delightful, the unforgettable Goha. May Allah have him in His mercy! May his memory live until the Day of Judgment!"

"Goha has made me forget my heaviest cares, O Shahrazade," replied King Shahryar, and little Doniazade cried: "O my sister, surely your words are a sweet and savoury refreshment!" "Yet what I have told you is not to be compared with The Tale of the Girl Heart's-Miracle, Lieutenant of the Birds," said Shahrazade; and King Shahryar cried: "As Allah lives, I have known many girls, and seen even more; but I do not recall that name. Who was Heart's-Miracle, and how came she to be Lieutenant of the Birds?"

So Shahrazade said:

THE TALE OF THE GIRL HEART'S-MIRACLE, LIEUTENANT OF THE BIRDS

It is related, O auspicious king, that in Baghdad, the city of peace, the home of joy, pleasure's dwelling, and the garden of wit, the khalifat Haroun Al-Rachid, Vicar of the Lord of the Three Worlds and Commander of the Faithful, had, as his cup companion and perfect friend, a man whose fingers were wrought of harmony, whose hands were loved of lutes, whose voice was a lesson for the nightingale, the marvel of music, the king of singers, Ishak Al-Nadim of Mosul. Haroun had given him, in pure love, the fairest of his palaces, and Ishak's duty there was to instruct the ablest of those girls, sought in the markets of the world for his master's harem, in the arts of music and singing. When one of them excelled her companions in mastery of song and of the lute, Ishak would take her to the khalifat, and she would sing and play before the throne. If she gave pleasure, she was raised straightway to the harem; if her accomplishments were not sufficient, she returned to her place among the pupils in Ishak's palace.

One day the Prince of Believers, feeling weary and oppressed, sent for his wazir Giafar the Barmicide, Ishak his cup companion, Masrur the sword bearer of his vengeance, Al-Fazl brother of Giafar, and Yunus the scribe. They found him disguised as a plain citizen and were bidden to put on the same kind of clothes themselves. As soon as the whole band had the appearance of simple friends, they went forth secretly from the palace and, taking boat on the Tigris, were rowed through the cool of the evening to Al-Taf. There they disembarked and set off at hazard along the road of unexpected adventure.

As they walked, talking and laughing together, a venerable old man with a white beard bowed before Ishak and kissed his hand. The singer at once recognised him as one of the chief furnishers of boys and girls to the palace; a sheikh with great aptitude for finding new pupils for the school of music.

Though he had no idea that he was in the presence of Haroun, the old man excused himself for interrupting Ishak's walk, and added: "Dear Master, I have long been wishing to see you, and had almost made up my mind to seek you at the palace. But, now that Allah has set me upon your way, I beg to be allowed a moment's conversation. I have at my slave house a girl already quite proficient with the lute, who, I am certain, would, in a short time, be an honour to your school. She is as beautiful as she is talented, and I should be deeply obliged if you could spare a moment to see her and hear her voice. If she pleases you, I will send her to the palace at once; if not, I will sell her to some merchant."

Ishak consulted the khalifat with a quick glance and then replied: "O uncle, precede us to your slave house and make ready the girl to appear before us, for I will follow you with my friends."

The old man hurried off, and the khalifat and his companions proceeded more leisurely in the the same direction.

This was no great adventure or out of the ordinary, but they accepted it as a good fisherman accepts the first fish which Allah sends. Soon they reached the slave house and found it easily large enough to contain all the tribes of the desert. They crossed the threshold and entered a large hall supplied with benches for the convenience of purchasers. There they sat down and waited, while the old man went to fetch the girl.

Soon she entered with the grace of a balancing reed, and took her place on a throne of precious woods, covered with Ionian embroidery, which had been prepared for her in the middle of the hall. As she saluted the company it was as if the sun looked forth out of heaven, but her hands trembled as she raised a

Damascus lute with strings of gold and silver. She took it to her breast, as a sister might caress her little brother, and, after preluding upon the docile cords, sang this song:

Sigh, O morning, I will send your sighs
As flower-scented salutes to the loved land,
To the far, shining band
With whom for a small change of love
I pawned my destinies.

My desire is stronger and climbs above
The difficult mountains, but, until I cross,
My feet are wounded on the diamond steep.
Also, my soul couched in its jewelled loss
Has taught my eyelids to forget their sleep.

As he heard, the khalifat could not help crying: "Your voice and your art are a glory of Allah, O benediction! In very truth you have excelled!" Then, remembering his disguise and fearing to be recognised, he fell silent, and Ishak began in his turn to compliment the girl. But no sooner had he opened his mouth than the harmonious child ran from her seat to him and kissed his hands, saying: "Our master, arms grow dull in your presence and tongues fall silent! Eloquence, meeting you, is stricken dumb! Only you of all men, master, can lift the veil of my need!" And as she spoke she burst into tears.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-twenty-seventh Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

ISHAK WAS BOTH surprised and moved by her grief. "Treasure among woman," he said, "why are you sad? And who are you, sweet and unknown?" The girl lowered her eyes without replying and Ishak, understanding that she would not speak in the presence of others, sought leave from the khalifat with a glance, and led the slave into a curtained space apart.

When she saw that she was alone with Ishak, the young singer gracefully lifted her face veil and showed brows of starlight with black curls on either temple, a straight nose which seemed to have been carved by a master from transparent pearl, a mouth shaped from the flesh of ripe pomegranates, a laughing chin, and darker eyes under the darkest brows.

"Speak in all confidence, my child," said Ishak; and the girl, in a voice like the falling of fountain water, spoke: "Long waiting and the torment of my soul have changed me, master; the tears have washed all the roses from my cheeks." "There are no roses in the moon," objected Ishak with a smile, "But why should you belittle your great beauty?" "How can one who has lived only for herself lay claim to beauty?" replied the girl, "My lord, the days have passed into months here and, at each new auction, I have devised some way to escape being sold. I have waited your coming that I might enter your music school, for the fame of it has spread even to the far plains of my country."

As she was speaking, the old man entered, and Ishak turned to him, saying: "What is her price?

And, first of all, what is her name?" "Her name is Heart's-Miracle, Topha Al-Kulub," answered the slave master, "And her price is at least ten thousand dinars. I have had great argument about the sum with certain rich lovers who would have purchased her, but I must confess that it was not the price but the girl herself that prevented the sale on each occasion. Knowing that I would never sell her without her consent, she made such pointed objections to the appearance of each of my clients that, eventually, for fear of her tongue, no one would bid for her. Therefore, in honesty, I cannot ask you more than ten thousand dinars, although that sum will hardly pay my out-of-pocket expenses." Ishak smiled as he replied: "O sheikh, add twice ten thousand dinars more, and we will feign that we have reached her value. Send her to my palace today and the money shall be yours." He left the astonished old man and the delighted girl, and, returning to the impatient khalifat, told him all that had passed. Then the disguised band went forth from the slave house to seek for new adventures.

In the meanwhile, the old man led Heart's-Miracle to Ishak's palace and, after receiving thirty thousand dinars, went his way. The little slaves crowded round Topha; they gave her a delicious bath in the hammam, dressed her, arranged her hair, and covered her with ornaments of taste and cost, such as collars, rings, bracelets, anklets, gold embroidered veils, and silver breastplates. When they had had their will of her, her face was tender with the light of a moon looking down upon a king's garden.

When Ishak came in and saw the girl standing in this greater beauty, as a new bride, he congratulated himself, and said within his heart: "As Allah lives, when she has had a few months in my school, and has improved a little in playing and singing, and has, through happiness, won back her roses, she will be the conquering star of Haroun's harem. I do not think that she is altogether mortal."

He gave orders that the best which the palace had to offer in instruction and entertainment should be placed at her disposal; and for some weeks the path to art and beauty was made delicious for her.

One day, when her fellow girls were all dispersed about the garden, and the palace was empty, Heart's-Miracle rose from the couch on which she was resting and wandered into the teaching hall. She sat down in her usual place, and pressed her lute against her breast with the gesture of a swan folding its head below its wing. Her beauty had come back to her, her pale languor had gone. The narcissus, dun-cheeked for the death of Winter, had fled from the plot and the anemone had come back in a second Spring. She was a balm and an enchantment, a light song going up to the God who made her.

She sang alone to the lute, and the hollow wood grew drunken until it trilled like a forest of birds. There was a miracle in each of her fingers.

If there had been any to hear her, they would have set down Ishak as the pupil and Topha as his master. You must remember that, since the day her hands and voice had trembled in the slave house, she had not played or sung except to herself, for Ishak's pupils at their lessons played and sang in chorus.

When, with the lute, she had called back all the voices of the birds which had housed in its native tree, she lifted her head and sang:

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-twenty-eighth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

Laughing you said: "Doctors are unavailing,
My eyes' black flasks hold the sole cure of worth."
I have become a little weary of your railing,
Are there not other targets over the earth?

Yet when the soul leans to the one companion
Not even Destiny can stem that yearning;
Fair hand on the rack screw, cease not turning,
For I shall die when the torturing is done.

In the meanwhile, Ishak, who had entered after a morning with the khalifat, heard her voice singing, miraculous and sweet like the breeze of early morning kissing the palm trees, lifting the heart's strength as almond oil fortifies the body of a wrestler.

He could not believe that this was mortal song; it was so like an escaped music from Eden that he uttered a cry of fear and admiration. Topha ran to him, with the lute still in her arms, and found him leaning against the wall of the vestibule with his hand to his heart, looking so pale and troubled that she cast aside the instrument, and cried: "Grace and deliverance from evil be upon you, my lord! I trust that you are not ill?" "Was it you who played and sang in the empty hall?" asked Ishak in a low voice. The young girl blushed and would not answer, fearing that he was angry, but, when he pressed her again and again, she said: "Alas, my lord, it was I." Ishak lowered his head, and murmured: "Behold the day of confusion! O proud Ishak, you thought that yours was the supreme voice and the supreme art of the century, and now you are proved a beginner, a bungling slave!"

He took the child's hand and carried it respectfully to his lips and brow; but Topha, though well-nigh fainting from emotion, had strength to pull away her hand, crying: "The name of Allah be upon you, master! Since when has the artist kissed the hand of the slave?" "Say not so, Heart's-Miracle, say not so," he replied humbly, "Ishak has found his master; beside your music, his music is as a dirham to a dinar. You are excellence itself and I shall take you straightway to the Commander of the Faithful. When his glance burns upon you, you will become a princess among women, who are already a queen among God's creatures. Your art and your beauty will be crowned together. Praise and praise to you, Heart's-Miracle! Do not quite forget Ishak when you come to the palace." "My lord," cried Topha in tears, "how could I forget the well-spring of my life and the strength of my heart?" Ishak laid her hand upon the Koran and, when she had sworn never to forget him, said: "Your destiny is a marvellous destiny, for I see the khalifat's desire written upon your brow. I pray you sing the same song to him as you sang just now, when I heard you and thought that I had entered Paradise before my time. . . . And now, as a last favour, will you tell me by what mystery a queen came to be among those slaves, and all Allah's treasure of earth and sea put up for sale?"

Topha smiled as she answered: "Dear my lord, Topha's story is so strange that were it written with needles in the interior corner of an eye yet would it serve as a lesson to the circumspect. One day soon, perhaps, I will tell you that story. Suffice it, for today, that I was a piece of Moorish loot and dwelt among the Moors. . . . Now I am ready to follow you to the palace."

Ishak, who had a reserved delicacy, questioned her no further. Instead, he clapped his hands and, when slaves appeared, ordered them to prepare their mistress's walking dress. They opened the great chests of clothing and dressed Heart's-Miracle in fair robes of striped Naysabur silk, perfumed with volatile essences and as soft to the touch as to the eye. They covered her with agreeable jewels and placed seven robes of seven colours upon her, so that she shone with the glory of a Chinese idol.

They sustained her on either hand, they carried the fringed train of her robes, and led her forth from the music school, while Ishak walked ahead, accompanied by a little black boy carrying the lute.

Ishak left the girl in the waiting hall and went in alone to the khalifat. "O Commander of the Faithful," he said, after making obeisance, "I have brought you a stray from Paradise, the chosen miracle of our God, Topha the singer, my teacher and not my pupil." Al-Rachid smiled, and asked: "Is this masterpiece the same girl whom we saw at the slave house?" "The same, my lord," answered Ishak, "She is fresher than the first morning and more musical to hear than the song of water over pebbles." "Let the morning come in!" cried Al-Rachid, "Let us hear the song of water over pebbles, for these things should not be hidden."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-twenty-ninth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

WHEN ISHAK WENT forth for Topha, the khalifat turned to Giafar, saying: "O wazir, is it not a prodigy to hear Ishak praising someone beside himself? I must confess that I am stupefied by this miracle. But we shall see."

Ishak soon returned, leading the girl delicately by the hand. The eye of the khalifat burned, his soul rejoiced, for her moving was the floating of silk scarves upon the West wind. As he gazed she kissed the earth between his hands and, uncovering her face, looked forth, white, serene, and pure as the full moon. Though she was troubled by the presence, she did not forget her natural and acquired politeness. "Greeting, O child of high nobility!" she said, "Greeting, O auspicious blood of our lord Muhamad (on whom be prayer and peace!). Greeting, O fold and shelter of the righteous, O upright judge of the Three Worlds! Greeting from the most submissive and forgotten of your slaves!"

Al-Rachid rejoiced, saying: "The blessing of Allah be upon you, O mould of perfection!" Then he looked at her more closely and well-nigh swooned for joy, and Giafar and Masrur well-nigh swooned for joy.

The khalifat rose from his throne and, going down to the girl, very gently returned the little silk veil to her face, as a sign that she belonged to his harem, and that the fairness of her had already retreated into the mystery of our Faith.

Then he invited her to be seated, saying: "O Heart's-Miracle, your coming has lighted our dwelling, but our ears wait upon you, even as our eyes have waited. May we not hear that music entered with you also?" Topha took the lute from the little black boy and, sitting down at the foot of the throne, made prelude as of birds waking and crying upon the strings. Then, as the men held their breath, she sang:

When on the plains of air the young moon rises
And meets the king of purple going to his bed,
In sudden white she kerchiefs her surprises,
But she's a queen. Girls such as I are stricken dead.

Al-Rachid looked at the singer with love pleasure, and came down to sit beside her on the carpet, saying: "O Topha, as Allah lives, you are the gift of gifts!" Then he turned to Ishak, crying: "O Ishak, in all you said you did not grant her praise enough! I do not hesitate to affirm that she easily surpasses even you. Surely it was written that only the khalifat could appreciate her." "By the life of my head, you are right, my lord!" cried Giafar, "She is a thief of souls." Then said Ishak: "O Commander of the Faithful, I am the more ready to admit the truth of what you say, since, when I heard her singing alone, I knew that henceforth all the talent which Allah has given me would be as nothing in my eyes." "Good, good!" replied the khalifat.

When Topha had sung again, Al-Rachid's emotion was so great that he did not care to let it be seen by his companions, so he turned to Masrur the eunuch, saying: "O Masrur, conduct your mistress to the chamber of honour in the harem, and see that she lacks for nothing." The gelded executioner led Topha away, and the khalifat watched her graceful going with moist eyes. "She is dressed with taste," he said to Ishak, "Whence come they, those robes which have not their equal in my palace?" "They come from your slave," answered Ishak, "but they were only his because of the khalifat's generosity. They are a present to the girl from the Prince of Believers, a most unworthy present." So Al-Rachid, who was never backward in munificence, bade Giafar give a hundred thousand dinars immediately to the faithful Ishak, and send ten robes of honour from the particular wardrobe to his palace.

Then, with his cares forgotten and his face shining like a flower, he went to Topha's new apartment and took her in his arms behind the veil of mystery. He found her as virgin as a pearl still wet from the sea, and rejoiced in her.

From that day, Topha held the highest throne in his heart, and he could not abide to be separated from her for a moment. He put the keys of all government in her hands, for she was a woman of great intelligence, and the gifts which he gave her, beyond the settled allowance of two hundred thousand dinars a month and fifty young girl slaves, would have bought all the lands of Irak and the Nile.

Love took so strong a hold upon him that he would trust none but himself to guard Topha, and carried away the key of her chamber whenever he left her. One day, as she sang before him, he was so exalted that he even made as if to kiss her hand, but she withdrew it with a movement of such briskness that she broke her lute and wept. Al-Rachid wiped away her tears and asked in a trembling voice the cause of them. "O Topha," he cried, "I pray to Allah that you shall never weep again!" "What am I that you should kiss my hand, my lord?" said Topha, "There is no creature upon earth worthy of that honour; and, if I allowed you to do it, Allah would surely punish my arrogance by taking away my happiness.'' Al-Rachid was content with this saying, and replied: ''I will not offend again, now that you know the true place which you hold in my soul. Refresh your dear eyes, and remember that I love none in the world but you, that I would die in loving.'' Topha fell at his feet and clasped his knees, but the khalifat raised her and kissed her, saying: ''You are my sole queen; you are more to me than Zobeida, my cousin and my wife.''

One day, when the khalifat had ridden forth to hunt, Topha sat alone, reading a book by the light of perfumed candles set in gold. Suddenly a scent-apple fell in her lap and, looking up, she beheld the Lady Zobeida standing before her. She sprang to her feet and, after respectful salutation, said: ''I pray you grant me your excuses, O my mistress! As Allah lives, if I had been free in my movement, I would have come every day to offer you my service as a slave. May Allah never deprive us of your presence!'' Zobeida sat down beside her, and said sadly: ''I knew that you had a great heart, O Topha, and therefore your words do not surprise me. Generosity is your native garment. Now I swear, by the life of my sultan, that it is not my habit to pay visits to all my husband's favourites. Yet I have come to you, because I think that you should hear of the humiliation which has been put upon me ever since your entry into the palace. I am cast aside, I am relegated to the importance of a barren concubine; the Commander of the Faithful neither comes to see me nor asks news of me.'' Here Zobeida wept and Topha wept also; but soon the queen went on: ''I have come to request you to bring it about that Al-Rachid allows me one night a month, only one night, so that I may not seem altogether a slave.'' Topha kissed her hand, and murmured: ''O crown upon my head, O mistress of us all, I wish with my soul that he would spend all of each month beside you, not one night only, if that might comfort you and win my pardon from my gracious lady. I pray that one day I may be nothing but your slave.''

At this point, Zobeida saw Al-Rachid approaching, for he had returned from his hunting and made a very straight line to Topha's pavilion. Therefore she slipped away, comforted by the girl's promise.

Al-Rachid entered with a smile and sat down, taking Heart's-Miracle upon his knees. They ate and drank together and then undressed. Not till they were both naked did Topha beg her lord to be merciful to Zobeida and to go to her that night. ''Sweet Topha,'' answered Haroun with a smile, ''if it is so very important that I should visit the Lady Zobeida, why did you wait to ask me until we had undressed?'' ''Because,'' she replied, ''I remember the words of the poet:

If you would beg, plain nakedness is best,
A leg's a better beggar than all wailing,
For there is no investment in a vest,
And only to be veiled is unavailing.''

Hearing this, Al-Rachid took Topha to his breast, and there passed what passed. Afterwards he left her to go to Zobeida, locking the door behind him. So much for him.

But what happened to Topha after this is so prodigious, so quite extraordinary that it must be told slowly.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-thirtieth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

WHEN TOPHA WEARIED of her book, she took up her lute and played so exquisitely that the walls came closer to listen.

Suddenly she felt that some unusual thing was taking place in the candlelight beside her. She turned and beheld an old man dancing silently in the middle of the room; his eyes were lowered, his look was venerable, and his carriage was majestic; he danced a dance of ecstasy such as no human could have compassed.

Topha grew cold with fear, for the windows and doors were shut, eunuchs were guarding all entrance to her, and she could not remember even having seen the old man in any part of the palace. "I take refuge in Allah against the Stoned One!" she murmured to herself, "I will go on playing as if nothing had happened." And she forced her fingers to the notes.

After an hour, the old man stopped dancing and came up close to the girl, kissing the earth between her hands. "You have excelled, O marvel of the East and West!" he said, "O Topha, O Heart's-Miracle, do you not know me?" "As Allah lives, I do not know you," she answered, "but I fear that you are some Jinni from the lands of Jinnistan. Far be the Evil One!" "You are right, Topha," said the old man with a smile, "I come from Jinnistan and am even its lord paramount. I am Eblis." "The name of Allah be upon me and about me! I take refuge in Allah!'' cried poor Topha; but Eblis kissed her hand and carried it to his brow, comforting her, and saying: ''Fear nothing, O Heart's-Miracle. You have long been under my protection, you have long been the loved desire of young Kamariya, queen of the Jinn, who surpasses all other immortals as you all human kind. For many weeks I have come with her every night to gaze upon you. She loves you madly, your name and your eyes are the only oaths upon her lips these days. When she sees you sleeping, she dies for your beauty, and, when she has to leave you, she languishes until another night be come. I have consented to act as her messenger, her advocate. If you let me lead you to Jinnistan, you shall be raised to the place of government among us. Today is auspicious; my daughter is to be married and my son circumcised; you will be the chief illumination of our double feast. You shall stay as long as you like, queening it over the hearts of the Jinn, and then, upon my sacred oath return at the first moment of your desire to do so.''

When Eblis (may he be confounded!) spoke in this sort, the terrified Topha did not dare to refuse him. She bowed her head, and, at this sign, Eblis took up her lute and led her by the hand, through the locked doors, until they came to the privy.

You must know that privies, wells, and cisterns, are the only means by which the subterranean Jinn can reach humanity. That is why no one enters the privy without invoking the name of Allah. Also, the Jinn go back by the same unsavoury way as they have come; that is a hard and fast rule, a rule to which there is no exception.

Finding herself among the privies with Eblis, the terrified Topha felt that she was going mad, but the Father of Evil obfuscated her with pleasantries, so that she did not struggle when he went down with her into the stinking hole. Nothing untoward happened during this difficult passage, and Topha soon found herself walking along a vaulted corridor which led to the open air. A horse, saddled and bridled, was waiting at the end of the corridor; Eblis lifted the girl on to the high-backed saddle, and she felt the beast rise up like a wave beneath her and heard the beating of great wings in the night. When she knew that she was flying through the air and that Eblis was keeping pace beside her, she fell back and swooned.

But the whistling of the air past her face soon brought her to herself, and she saw that they were traversing a vast meadowland, so filled with flowers that it appeared like a garment of painted silk below them. In the middle of this meadowland rose a palace with monstrous towers and a hundred and eighty copper doors. Upon the principal threshold the chiefs of the Jinn, habited in their best, were waiting for her.

When they saw Eblis, they cried: "Topha has come, Topha has come!" and, crowding round, lifted her from the horse and carried her into the palace, struggling to kiss her hands the while. She was set down with great pomp on a red gold throne, heavy with sea pearls, in the midst of so large a gold-walled and silver-columned hall that the tongue of a man would grow hair before he could tell of it.

The chiefs of the Jinn ranged themselves about the steps of the throne. All showed the appearance of humanity save two, who had single eyes set askew in the midst of their foreheads and the projecting tusks of a wild pig. As soon as each had taken his place according to his rank, a gracious young queen advanced through the hall, lighting the air about her with her smile; she was followed by three fairy girls, swinging their hips delightfully as they walked. They all saluted Topha, and the young queen began to ascend the steps of the throne, while Heart's-Miracle came down to meet her. When they had met, the royal lady kissed her guest long upon the cheeks and mouth.

This was no other than Kamariya, who had fallen in love with Topha; and the three attendants were her sisters, Gamra, Sharara, and Wakhima.

Kamariya sat down on a gold seat, and then instantly sprang up again to embrace Topha for a second time, to press her against her breast and stroke her cheek.

When he saw this, Eblis laughed heartily, and cried: "O the fair accolade! Be kind, my pretties, and take me between you."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-thirty-first Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

A GREAT LAUGH, in which Topha joined, rang through the hall, and the fair Kamariya cried: "I love you, dear sister, and the depths of my heart can have no witness but my soul. I loved you even before I saw you!" To this Topha replied politely: "By Allah, you are very dear to me, Lady Kamariya. I have been your slave ever since my glance first rested on you." The queen kissed her, thanked her, and presented her to the three princesses, saying: "These are the wives of our chiefs." So Topha saluted each appropriately, as they bowed before her.

Slaves entered with a vast tray of meats, and the five young women sat about this tray, in the midst of which was engraved:

Hot
Meats,
Cheese,
Fish,
And
Sweets;
Bake,
Roast,
And
Stew;
Please
Take
What
Most
You
Wish.

In spite of this invitation, Topha was so preoccupied with the sight of the two repulsive Jinn that she was unable to eat much, and could not help asking Kamariya who they were and why they were so horrible. "That one, sweetheart," answered Kamariya with a laugh, "is Al-Shisban, and the other is the great Maïmun, the swordbearer. You find them uglier than the rest because they have refused, through pride, to put on a human appearance in order not to frighten you." "I cannot look at them!" whispered Topha, "Maïmun is especially terrifying. I am very frightened of Maïmun." At this Kamariya burst out laughing, and Shisban asked what was amusing her. She explained fully in the language of the Jinn, but Shisban, instead of being angry, filled the hall with a tempest of answering laughter.

When the gay feast came to an end, great flagons of wine were brought, and Eblis came up to Topha, saying: "The sight of you has already exalted us more than wine, my mistress; but we all, kings and queens alike, languish for the greater drunkenness of your singing. The night is already far spent, will you not oblige us with a song?" Topha took up her lute and played so ravishingly that one might have supposed that the palace was dancing with her, like an anchored ship. Then she sang:

Peace be upon all who have sworn faith with me!
Have I not said that I will meet you, O you who meet me?
I will reproach you in a voice softer than morning,
Cooler than crystal water.
My lids are faithful to tears,
Because the essence of my soul is that wine
By which my friends can live.

This song threw the chiefs of the Jinn into an ecstasy of pleasure; the monstrous Maïmun began to dance with a finger thrust up his lips, and Eblis cried: "The joy is too much. It stops my blood, it hurts my breathing!" Queen Kamariya rose and kissed the singer between the eyes. "Heart of my heart, cool of my soul," she said, and begged Heart's-Miracle to sing again. This was her second song:

I feed my soul with crumbled hopes
Until the rocks die down like snow,
For patience has more power, I know
Than fifty gilded horoscopes.

After this, all the Jinn began dancing, and Eblis kissed Topha's fingers, demanding another song. "Why does not Kamariya ask me?" retorted Topha; but the young queen ran up to her and kissed both her hands, begging most ardently for more. Then said Topha: "As Allah lives, my voice is tired from singing; but I will, if you wish, recite for you the songs of the light wind, of the flowers, and of the birds."

She set aside her lute, and said, in the pleased silence:

THE SONG OF THE LIGHT WIND

I am the messenger of lovers, the sigh carrier,
Faithfully bearing secrets, remembering every word,
The indefatigable laughing flatterer,
Tender for love's adventure, softening my breath
For true love, but by false love harshly heard.
And if girls sigh to guess in leaves my death,
Yet I hearten their lads with my presence
To make their prayer
To slenderness.
I am a lute in white air,
And my essence
Is tenderness.

If I am variable, it is a reasoned gadding
To follow my sisters, the seasons, in their way,
(Who call me useful, but I am only fair . . .)
In Spring I flow from the north, making night day,
Fanning the fruit seed here and there.
To favour the clusters of my trees
In the hot season I run from the east

And sigh on the burnish of the leaves, adding
My beauty to the least
Of these.

I come up out of the south in autumn time
To fill my fruits, my coloured loves
For prime.
My winter fingers from the west are doves
Whose grey wings free the branches, whose fans give
Dry healing that the tree may live.

At morn
I carry the scent,
I make flowers speak with flowers, I balance the corn,
I give the streams their silver chain,
I quick the palm, and lead lost youth again
Back to a woman's tent.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-thirty-second Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:
And Topha said again:

THE SONG OF THE ROSE

My visit is shorter than a ghost's,
Between Winter, it is, and Summer.
Hasten to play with me, play with me;
Time is a sword.

I balm my breath,
I am the colour of love,
I tingle in the hand of the girl who takes me.
I am your guest,
Hope not to keep me long,
The nightingale loves me.

I am the glory,
But the glory is hardest pressed of all the flowers.
I am the ever wounded,
Thorns spring out on my youth,
Steel arrows splashing my silks with my blood,
Staining my silks vermilion.

Yet I remain the elegant of passing things,
The pride of morning.
I wear my beauty in a crystal shift of dew.
Men hurry me from my green to another crystal,
My body turns to water, my heart is burned,
My tears are collected
And my flesh is torn.
I feel the passion of fire,
My soul is fumed off,
My spirit goes in vapour;
My sweet sweat is a record of my pain.
The passionate
Breathe the musk of my cast garments with delight;
My body goes from you, but my soul remains;
The wise do not regret my little time in the garden,
But lovers would have me,
Silly pretty lovers,
Have me there for ever.

And Topha said again:

THE SONG OF THE JASMIN

Come to me and mourn not, I am the jasmin.
My stars are whiter than silver
On the blue noon of air.

I come from the breast of God
To the breasts of women,
And am an ornament for black hair.

Use wine with me
And your friend's laughter
Shall shine more white.

My tint attests the camphor;
I am here when I am not here
So sweet am I.

My name detects the error of despair,
I am white joy, my lords.

And Topha said again:

THE SONG OF THE NARCISSUS

My beauty is not wine to me,
For I have eyes of languor,
And balance like music
And am nobly born.

I consider the flowers,
I talk with the flowers in moonlight.
My beauty gives me a throne among them,
Yet I am a slave.

I am a slave,
The cincture of obedience,
The good servant
Who stands with a straight body
And bowed head.

I bare my neck,
I abide in my pure tent
Pitched on an emerald column;
My robe is gold and silver.

My modesty will excuse the wantoning of my eyes
As I hang my head above the waters.

And Topha said again:

THE SONG OF THE VIOLET

I wear a green cymar,
A sea-purple robe of honour,
Being quite little
And delightful.

My sister the rose is the pride of morning,
And I am the mystery of morning,
I am the dark child
Who wears an early grief.

You would have thought the modesty of my short
hours . . .

I ravish my darlings for half a day,
And they pull me and use me and sell me cheap,
Make songs about me
And then despise me.

But in the morning the wise lift me
From my pale drought of death,
And balm disease with me.

The scent of my small life delighted the lad,
And my body dies for him.

But, but,
A little army with purple shields,
With emerald helmets,
Riding to victory . . .

And Topha said again:

THE SONG OF THE NENUPHAR

My shame could not live naked in the air,
I chose the passion of the water;
Immaculate petals
Guessed at rather than seen.
(Lovers, remember this!)
The river places are the bed of my rest
For ever.

That I should thirst
When he has given me to drink
Is love.
I thrust my gold cup to the sun
But night on the waters
Draws me as the moon draws
The waters.

I take my dreams to the green nest of water.

You lose me?
I am carried with open eyes;
We die together, water and I,
And you say you lose me.

He gave me what I am,
My shame could not live naked in the air,
I chose the passion of the water;
Immaculate petals
Guessed at rather than seen.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-thirty-third Night
Had Come

She said:

And Topha said again:

THE SONG OF THE GILLYFLOWER

The yellow garment of love sickness,
The white and yearning robe,
The blue frustrated veil . . .

I am a wise white, He knows,
For they will not touch my unscented nakedness.

And I am a wise yellow, Allah knows,
For I blab the scent of my secret,
But not your secret.

Also I am a grief-bound blue,
For light offends my mystery.

I break at night, He knows!

And Topha said again:

THE SONG OF THE BASIL

Coloured flowers,
Now that you have decked my garden
Take me,
The stream's bride,
The wise listener in moonlight,
Take me, coloured flowers!

As a dance cannot be jocund without instruments,
So wit cannot rejoice without me.
If the Prophet has promised me in Paradise
Why remember the mint flowers,

The chattering mint flowers?

The stream's bride,
The wise listener in moonlight,
Now that you have decked my garden
Take me, coloured flowers!

And Topha said again:

THE SONG OF THE CAMOMILE

Symbolists, symbolists . . .
And, if not, sleep . . .

Have you seen my flowers spreading on the fields,
The far-noticed white,
And the yellow disk giving languor?
The verses of the Book,
The clear verses,
And the difficult verses?

You have come to me and delighted,
You have come to me again and lo! I was not.
And you have not understood.

My bruised soul
Mounts into the singing of the doves
And you have thought it pleasure;
Though my white is recognisable far off,
You lie in the fields of my painting
And have not understood.

And Topha said again:

THE SONG OF THE LAVENDER

I am no terrace flower,
Vile hands and foolish talk
Escape me,
I grow in the hot brown dust,
Loving not men, but man.

No slave, no city thing
Can touch me.
Come to me in the waste heart of Arabia
Far from the dwellings of pale men,
For my delight is there.

I am the mistress of hermits,
Wild bees, deer, and the bitter absinthe
Are my sisters,
I am a free girl knowing no market.
Lust seeks me not, but the wild rider
Seeks me.

I would wish you to come to the valleys
Where the breeze kisses me at morning,
I would wish you
To lie near the wine of me.

Allah, Allah,
Even the camel-boy, telling of me,
Forgets his oaths!

And Topha said again:

THE SONG OF THE ANEMONE

If my heart were my body,
I should be above
The crying of the coloured flowers.

For his girl's cheek
A lover carries my blood as a flask of praise.

Yet the vases of the feast do not invite me
Because my heart is black.

I will fight no more.

I am the bright still of unhappiness.

"And now that I have finished the songs of the flowers and the light wind," said Topha, "I will say over for you, if you wish, some of the songs of the birds."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-thirty-fourth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:
AND TOPHA SAID:

THE SONG OF THE SWALLOW

If I choose farmers and their terraces
It is to escape my brothers of the trees;
The part of stranger is my chief delight;
The average of the world is not polite
Except to strangers. I will do no harm
To the provision of my chosen farm,
Neither my building nor my food is theirs;
These things I gather all from Allah's cares.
It is their wit and not their meat I wish,
Their conversation, not their supper dish,
Their altruistic phrases, not their seed;
And, as I cost them nothing for my feed,
They learn to love me as a friend indeed.

And Topha said again:

THE SONG OF THE OWL

They call me wisdom's fowl, I hear,
But is there wisdom anywhere?
Wisdom and peace and happiness,
These might be found in loneliness.
Have you a friend, do you see men,
One man? You will not find them then.
Even as a drop forecasts the sea

Two souls forecast calamity;
There are no friends, I thank my God,
In the old wall of my abode.
I doom all sumptuous palaces
To the ill-starred who dwell in these;
I wish all delicate meats to those
Most poor, whose money golden grows.
Leave me my soul, I've known my soul
In ditch, in wall, in hollow bole,
Potential good, potential ill,
And both still-born and frustrate still.
Nought's to be feared and nought enjoyed
In a void spun upon a void:
Dark speech, and answer dark again;
Some things are fatal to explain.
Those obligations? Very fine,
They forgot theirs! and I with mine? . . .
They call me wisdom's fowl, I hear,
But is there wisdom anywhere?

And Topha said again:

THE SONG OF THE FALCON

That I am sombre and most spare of words
Is a notorious fact among the birds.
My one perfection and my single beauty
Is taciturn devotion to my duty.
I am not as that fatuous nightingale
Whose ceaseless singing wearies all the vale
And whose intemperate speech, when heard on high,
Brings down misfortune and calamity.
The rule of silence is my one profession,
And my sole virtue lies in my discretion.
When I am caught, I still remain discreet;

I give no sign that I have felt defeat;
You will not see my head turned and down cast
To weep above the footsteps of the past,
Rather I look far forward and still chase
The dove of wisdom on from space to space.
So in the end my master yearns to me
And, fearing lest my cold reserve should be
My loss of love, he blinds me with a hood,
(The Koran says: To veil the eyes is good.)
He binds my tongue down to my under beak,
(The Koran says: 'Tis wisdom not to speak.)
He checks my freedom with a silken chain,
(Walk not in pride—the Koran says again.)
Silent and uncomplaining, I abide
These holy bands by which each sense is tied.
My wisdom ripens in the hooded night
Till kings become the servants of my flight;
Their royal hands bear up my pinions' beat,
I spurn their wrists beneath ascending feet.

And Topha said again:

THE SONG OF THE SWAN

Mistress of each desire, I use the sky,
The water, and the meadow equally;
With the same calm of confidence I show
My lily-bended neck, my carven snow,
My pouncet box of amber golden-sprent,
My feet of bogwood, in each element.
My royalty is whiteness, loneliness,
And dignity compact; I am mistress
Of water's mystery and of the green
Dim glinting drifts of treasure submarine.
While I, self-sailed and with myself for guide,

Grow rich with each adventure of the tide,
The timorous shore-building stay-at-home
Desiring pearls, still nets the bitter foam.

And Topha said again:

THE SONG OF THE BEE

I build my house within the hill,
And, in my feeding, do no ill
Upon the flowers I fasten to
For forage lighter than the dew.
When, with my harmless theft content
And mind on meditation bent,
I go to my abiding place
And brood on bees' predestined grace,
My eye is met at every turn
By works where Euclid deigned to learn.
Of all my musings this is chief:
That toil can be both joy and grief;
For, if my wax is fruit of pain,
Honey is learning's golden gain.
And next I ponder how my sting
Teaches the whole of love making:
I give all sweet, she gives all sweet
To him who'll take a wound for it.
Love makes all heaviness seem light.
O fools, good-day! O wise, good-night!

And Topha said again:

THE SONG OF THE MOTH

I am the lover whose love endlessly
Burns up his heart. Life's and love's law for me

Is to be swift to perish of desire,
Is to count consummation worth the fire.
Her kisses tear the tissue of my wings,
But listen to the song the candle sings:
"Do not condemn me, for I suffer too;
The flame loves me, even as I love you;
The sigh of his approach must burn me up,
As he draws near to drink, he melts the cup.
It was by fire that I was driven away
Where I and honey loitered yesterday.
To shed my life, to waste, to weep hot tears,
To jet my little hour to light the years,
Dear moth, dear moth, that is my destiny."
But fire blazed out to candle and to me:
"You drank my death, eternity was in it.
Have you not lived all living in a minute?"

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-thirty-fifth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

AND TOPHA SAID again:

THE SONG OF THE CROW

That, dressed in black, with harsh importunate cry,
I trouble all delight as I go by;
That, circling shadow-wise the camps of Spring,
I prophesy their bitter leave-taking;
That, when I see a love, I croak its doom,

Or, flecking some bright palace with my gloom,
Foretell the speedy ruining of it—
These and more sombre habits I admit.
If you, who blame me for such things, could guess
Wherein lay your abiding happiness,
You would wear midnight garments, even as I,
And curb your conversation to a sigh.
But no! Vain pleasure is your only goad
And vanity decoys you from the road;
You cannot realise that friendship is
To blame, not praise, to teach and not to please.
I, only I, of all religious folk,
Retain the symbol of a sable cloak,
And weep for passing time and groan to see
The caravans set out high-heartedly.
All men are deaf. Although I cry aloud,
They turn their backs upon the mourning cloud;
Alive they will not heed me, though they could,
And dead they cannot hear me, if they would.

And Topha said again

THE SONG OF THE HOOPOE

When I came up out of Saba
With a love writing for the gilded king,
A letter from the queen of long blue eyes,
Sulayman said to me:
"O hoopoe, you have brought from Saba
News which has set my heart to dancing."

He covered me with his blessing
And put a crown of pride upon my head;
I wear it still.

He taught me wisdom,
And even now,
When ages of dust are sifted above him,
I go sometimes apart
To say over the lessons of Sulayman.

He said:
"O hoopoe,
If conscience were of good understanding
She would hear glad tidings.

If the soul were sleepless
She would receive a light not of the stars.

If the body were pure,
The eyes would see love.

If a man threw off the garment of pride
He would walk naked with God,
And there would be no more frozen thoughts.
If you were to shed that cloak
You would learn how the health of the soul
Poises upon a balance,
You would refresh yourself with the fan of hope,
You would plant the cherry tree of refuge
And the plum tree of correction,
You would mould a mortar for your soul out of patience,
You would fashion humility to a sieve,
And, after a night of waking,
Walk with the Friend alone at dawn.

Who sees no portent
In the crying of the door,
In the buzz of flies,

The murmur of insects in the dust,
He also will disregard
The walking of the mists,
The light of mirage,
And the colours of the sea fog;
For there is no wisdom in that man.''

When she had said over these songs of the flowers and birds, Topha fell silent, and exclamations of delighted reverence came to her from all the Jinn. Eblis kissed her feet, and the queens embraced her, weeping. All that host signified clearly with their eyes and hands: ''Our tongues are bound by admiration, and we are so exalted that we cannot speak.'' They jumped up and down rhythmically in their seats, waving their legs in the air, an action which says among the Jinn: ''You have excelled and we thank you!'' The Ifrit Maïmun danced round and round, with a finger thrust up his lips, by which he sought to exclaim, ''I marvel, I marvel!''

''As Allah lives, good masters and mistresses,'' cried Topha, greatly affected by this praise, ''if I were not weary I would say many more songs for you. You should hear the songs of the nightingale, the quail, the starling, the canary, the dove, the wood-pigeon, the goldfinch, the peacock, the pheasant, the partridge, the kite, the vulture, the eagle, and the ostrich; you should hear the songs of the dog, the camel, the horse, the onager, the ass, the giraffe, the gazelle, the ant, the sheep, the fox, the goat, the wolf, the lion, and many, many others. But, if Allah wills, we shall meet again for another bout of poetry. For the moment, I beg the sheikh Eblis to take me back to the palace of my master, the Commander of the Faithful, for he must be distraught because of me. I would willingly wait for the circumcision and the marriage, but I have not the strength.''

''O Heart's-Miracle,'' answered the sheikh Eblis, ''our souls are tortured by your wish to leave us. Is there no way by which I could persuade you to stay a little longer? We have but tasted the wine, and now you pluck the cup from our lips. Can we not have a few moments more, O Topha?'' ''It is beyond my power to grant,'' replied Heart's-Miracle, ''I must return at once to the Prince of Believers, for a child of earth can find no happiness away from earth, and my heart is sad to be so far from other hearts. Surely you would not keep me against my will?''

''Be it upon my head and before my eyes,'' said Eblis kindly, ''but first I must tell you, Topha, that I know your music master, the admirable Ishak bin Ibrahim of Mosul.'' He smiled to himself a little, and then continued: ''And he knows me, too. Certain things happened between us on a winter evening, which I shall tell you some day, if Allah wills. It is a long story; but he has not yet forgotten the new modes of the lute which I taught him, or, for that matter, the spirit girl with whom I made him glad. If you were not in such a hurry, I would let you hear all about it. . . . At least I insist that you shall not depart empty-handed. I am myself going to teach you an expedient upon the lute which will win you renown throughout the world and increase the khalifat's love for you.'' ''Do as you think best,'' said Topha.

Eblis picked up the girl's lute and played upon it in a quite new mode, with such unheard-of artifice and repetition, such perfection of tremolo, that Topha felt she was hearing music for the first time, and that all the teaching of Ishak had been but error. She took the lute from Eblis (may Allah confound him!) and repeated the lesson note by note, so that all the Jinn cried: "Excellent! Excellent" and the Evil One himself said: "You have reached the topmost pinnacle of this art, and I am going to give you a diploma, countersigned by all the chiefs of the Jinn, to the effect that you are the queen of earthly lute players. I shall also nominate you Lieutenant of the Birds, for your poems have proved you peerlessly entitled to that rank."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-thirty-sixth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

EBLIS HAD HIS chief scribe prepare a cock skin, and write on it, under his dictation, in flowing Kufic character and with perfect alignment, a notice to the effect that the girl Topha had been appointed Lieutenant of the Birds and queen of all earthly lute players. This document was sealed with the seal of Eblis, and counter-sealed by all the chiefs and queens of the Jinn. Then it was shut in a little gold box and given, with high ceremony, to Topha, who carried it to her brow in sign of thanks.

Then, at a signal from Eblis, twelve slaves entered the hall carrying twelve cupboards of identical size and ornament. Eblis opened them, one by one, and, as he showed the contents of each to Topha, cried: "These are yours!" The first cupboard was filled to the top with jewels, the second with coined gold, the third with gold in bars, the fourth with wrought gold, the fifth with gold candlesticks of great elaboration, the sixth with myrobalan and dried conserves, the seventh with silk underclothing, the eighth, with cosmetics and perfumes, the ninth with lutes, the tenth with gold plate, the eleventh with brocaded garments, and the twelfth with robes of many coloured silks.

When Topha had rejoiced over these gifts, Eblis made a sign to the porters, who took up the cupboards upon their backs and ranged themselves in order behind the girl. The queens came weeping to say farewell, and Queen Kamariya sighed out: "Though you are leaving us, dear sister, I am sure that you will let us come to see you in your pavilion sometimes, to rejoice our eyes with the beauty which leaves us desolate. If you wish, I shall not be invisible next time; I shall assume the form of a little human girl, and wake you with my breath." "Please do so, O my sister Kamariya," answered Topha, "I shall rejoice to wake under your breath and feel you lying against me." And they kissed for the last time.

Eblis bent his back and took Topha astride on his neck; he rose into the air and left that tempest of sighs behind; and the porters followed him close. In less time than it takes to tell, Topha had been set down gently on her own bed and the cupboards had been ranged silently along the wall of her apartment. Then the thirteen spirits kissed the earth before the bed and retired, as they had come, like shadows.

It seemed to Topha that she had never left that place; to assure herself that her experience had not been a dream, she took up her lute and played upon it after the manner that Elbis had taught her, singing at the same time verses of return. The eunuch on guard outside the door heard the playing and singing. "As Allah lives, it is my mistress Topha!" he cried, and began to run through the palace, though he was a heavy man, as if all the arms of the desert pursued him. After a deal of tumbling and scrambling to his feet again, he prostrated himself before Masrur, who stood as usual on guard outside the khalifat's bedchamber. "My lord, my lord," he panted, "wake the Commander of the Faithful, for I bring good news!" Masrur cursed him, saying: "O vile Sawab, you must be mad if you think I dare wake the khalifat at such an hour." But Sawab kept on insisting so loudly that Haroun Al-Rachid woke, and cried from within: "What is the meaning of this tumult, Masrur?" "Sawab has come, my lord, bidding me wake you," replied the trembling executioner. "What has Sawab to say to me?" asked the khalifat in a threatening voice; but Sawab could only stammer out: "My lord, my lord!" "Go and see what is the matter," said Haroun to one of the girls who watched about his bed.

The slave came out and led Sawab into the presence, but the poor negro was so moved by the news he brought that he forgot to kiss the earth between the khalifat's hands, and cried, as if he were talking to an equal: "Get up, get up at once! My mistress Topha is singing and playing in her apartment! Just you come and hear her, my boy!" Then, as the khalifat looked at him without a word, he went on: "Can you not hear what I am saying? I tell you Topha is playing and singing in her bedroom! Come on lazybones!" Al-Rachid leaped from his bed and struggled into the first garment which came to hand, crying the while: "What are you saying, wretch? How dare you speak of your mistress? You know that she has disappeared, you know that the wazir Giafar has assured me that it was a matter of enchantment, you know that folk who are stolen away by the Jinn never return! What maggot of a dream has entered your black head, that you should disturb me in this way?" Then cried the eunuch in an ecstasy of impatience: "I've had no dream in my black head, I have not even been to bed; I tell you Topha is not dead, so come along, my bean-face!"

The khalifat fell into a fit of laughter, and cried: "If you are telling the truth, I will make your fortune; I will free you and give you a thousand dinars. But, if you have been dreaming, I will have you crucified."

"O Allah, O Protector, O Master of salvation, grant that it was no maggot!" murmured Sawab, as he led the marvelling khalifat to Topha's door.

Al-Rachid heard the singing and playing of his mistress; for a full minute he fumbled with the key in the lock, and then hurled himself into the room, calling to Allah against all the wiles of the Devil.

Topha ran up to him and caught him to her breast, but the khalifat uttered a cry and slipped down from her arms in a death-seeming swoon. She bathed his temples with musked rose-water; but, even when he came to, he was as one drunk, and the tears fell through his beard onto the marble. When at last amazement left him and he could sigh with delight in the girl's arms, he cried: "O Topha, your absence was a marvel, but your return is a greater marvel." "Wait till you have heard all," answered Heart's-Miracle between their kisses; and she told him of the silent dancing of the old man, of the descent into the privy, of the winged horse, of the palace of the Jinn, of the beauty of Kamariya, of the songs of the flowers and birds, of the Devil's music lesson, and of her brevet written upon cock skin. When she had shown the document to the astonished khalifat, she opened each of the cupboards in turn, but a thousand human tongues could give no picture of the riches he beheld. Suffice it to say that those things were the foundation of the great wealth of the Abbasides.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-thirty-seventh Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

AL RACHID'S JOY was so great, in his recovery of his dear Heart's-Miracle, that he had the city of Baghdad lighted with coloured fires and gave great feasts to the poor. And during these feasts Ishak Al-Nadim, who was now held in greater honour than ever by his master, sang publicly a song which he had written to the air of Eblis (may Allah for ever confound him!).

Haroun Al-Rachid and Topha lived together in love delight, until they were visited by the Inexorable, the Tomb Filler.

Such, O auspicious king, continued Shahrazade, is the tale of Heart's-Miracle, Lieutenant of the Birds.

And King Shahryar, who had marvelled at this story and, above all, at the songs of the flowers and birds, and, of these, especially at the songs of the hoopoe and the crow, said within his soul: "As Allah lives, this wazir's daughter is my blessing! A woman of her quality does not deserve death. At least, as it is likely that she may have more stories to tell me, I will reflect for a little longer before deciding her fate.'' In an unusual exaltation of spirit, he suddenly drew Shahrazade to his heart, crying: ''Blessed are your like, O Shahrazade! Your tale has delighted me, and your songs of the flowers and birds have edified me. If, O virtuous and talented, you have one or two or three or four more stories of the same kind to tell me, begin at once, for tonight my ears are open to your eloquence.'' ''I am the king's slave,'' answered Shahrazade, ''and his praises are far above my worth. If he wishes it, I would rejoice to tell him certain truths concerning women, police captains, and the like; but I must warn my king that the stories which I have in mind are a little daring.'' ''You may certainly tell me of these things,'' answered King Shahryar, ''for, if the matter of your discourse be woman, nothing can surprise me. I know that woman is like a twisted rib; if she is to be cured, she must be twisted further; and if she is twisted too far, she breaks. Speak as freely as you like, for we have been wise enough since the day our queen betrayed us.'' The king's face grew dark again and his brows came together at the memory of that old misfortune; so little Doniazade made haste to cry: ''Dear sister, please, please begin your tales about women and policemen, and be as free as you like, for our king knows well the difference between gems and pebbles, women and women.'' ''You are right, little one,'' answered Shahrazade, ''I will now tell our master The Tale of Al-Malik Al-Zahir Rukn Al-Din Bibars Al-Bundukdari and his Captains of Police.''

And Shahrazade said:

THE TALE OF AL-MALIK BIBARS AND HIS CAPTAINS OF POLICE

It is related—but the Invisible knows all!—that there was once in Cairo, in the land of Egypt, a sultan of the illustrious Turkish Baharites, whose name was Al-Malik Al-Zahir Rukn Al-Din Bibars Al-Bundukdari. During his reign Islam shone with unprecedented lustre, and the empire rolled gloriously between the extremes of east and west. Under the blue heaven of Allah the strongholds of the Franks and the Nazarenes were not to be found, for their kings had become a carpet for Al-Malik's feet. No voice was heard in the deserts and green meadowland save the voice of the Believer, no footprint seen that had not been made by one walking in the way of righteousness. Therefore be manifold blessing given to the Fortunate One, to our lord Ahmad Muhamad, son of Abdalla, the Prophet of Allah, because he showed the way of righteousness! Amen.

Sultan Bibars so loved and was so loved of his people that the least important custom, tradition, or local usage which concerned them interested him very deeply. Greater even than his passion for seeing with his own eyes was his eagerness to hear these matters treated of in stories, and thus it happened that the best tale-tellers among his court were sure of the highest honours.

One night, when he was more hungry for instruction than usual, he called together his captains of police and bade them tell him of any matters which they considered worth recording. "Be it upon our head and before our eyes!" they answered, "Does our master wish us to tell him of things which we have experienced ourselves or of happenings which we have by hearsay?" "That would be a delicate decision," said Bibars, "I think that I will leave you free to choose for yourselves, provided that your tales are sufficiently surprising." "Our tongues and souls belong to the king!" they cried.

The first to speak was a captain named Muin Al-Din, whose liver was rotten with the love of women. "O king of time," he said, "I will tell you of an extraordinary adventure which happened to myself in the early days of my career."

And he told:

THE FIRST CAPTAIN'S TALE

O MY LORD and crown upon my head, when I first entered the police service at Cairo, under our chief Alam Al-Din Sanjar, I already had a great reputation. Every son of a pimp, every son of a dog, every son of a gallowsbird, and, I think I may even say, every son of a whore, feared me and fled from me as if I had been the yellow pest. When I rode my horse through the city, people pointed at me and winked fearfully to each other and bowed to the very dust; but I took no more notice than if a fly's wing had brushed my lips, and would ride on, swelling with pride.

One day, as I was busy in the wali's courtyard, lying down with my back to the wall and thinking of my greatness, something as heavy as the Day of Judgment fell from the sky into my lap. Picking it up, I found it to be a sealed purse containing a hundred dirhams. As I slipped the sweet child into her father's breast, I looked to every direction of earth and sky, but could see no one; therefore I gave thanks to Allah and went my way.

Next morning my duty took me to the same place, but I had hardly lain down before something of painful weight hit me on the side of the head. I snatched it up in fury and discovered that it was another purse, own sister to the child of my bosom. As I sent it to join her, I raised my head and twisted my neck and spun round and stood still, without being able to catch the least glimpse of any who might have sent this charming stranger. "Are you asleep or are you not asleep?" I asked, and I replied: "You are not asleep, you are not even sleepy." Having satisfied myself on this point, I lifted the skirts of my garment and walked from the courtyard, casually and as if nothing had happened, spitting copiously at every few steps.

But on the third morning I took my precautions. As soon as I went on duty, I shut my eyes and began to snore like a troop of wild camels. Suddenly, as I lay there, my lord, I felt a hand hunting for something about my navel. As I had nothing about my person which could be readily stolen, and was on the alert, I was concerned and waited to see what would transpire. When I felt that the time was ripe, I gripped the hand suddenly with my own, crying: "Whither away, my sister?" At the same moment I opened my eyes wide and sat up abruptly. The owner of the gentle little jewelled hand, a girl of fairy-like beauty, stood regarding me with a smile. O my lord the sultan, she was like jasmin! "Greeting, dear mistress," I cried, as I took a firmer grip of the slender wrist, "The goods are yours and the shopkeeper as well; but tell me, sweet, of what terrace are you the rose? Of what cluster are you the jacinth?

Of what garden are you the nightingale, O most desirable of damsels?''

Without the least shame of gesture or voice, the child signed to me to rise, saying: ''O Muin, follow me if you would know me.'' Without an instant's hesitation I rose and walked along behind the girl, as if I had been her milk brother or had known her all my life.

When we came in this order to the bottom of a blind alley, the girl turned and signed to me to approach. I came up smiling and made ready to embrace my fair guide. I approached her, saying: ''Well, my mistress, now that we are alone in this secluded spot I see no need for formalities.'' ''Don't be a fool, Captain Muin,'' she answered, ''I am not interested in your embraces.'' I was amazed at her cold reply, but I respected her wishes and answered: ''You are the mistress here and I have already been loaded with your favours. But tell me, O daughter of honesty, since my sturdy manliness and my widely known gallantry do not tempt you, why have you given me two purses, why have you tickled my navel, and why have you led me to the bottom of a blind alley, which is the very place for assaulting and giving in assault?'' ''O Captain Muin,'' she replied, ''I have more confidence in you than in any other man of this city, but, though I have sought you out, it is for a very different reason from the one which you suppose.'' ''Whatever your object, dear mistress,'' I hastened to assure her, ''I am your debtor and your slave.'' ''Very well,'' she smiled, ''Now listen carefully, O captain: I am a woman in love. . . .'' ''Rest assured, dear lady,'' I said, ''I will find the fellow and bring him to you.'' ''It is not a man, Captain, of whom I am fond, but one of my own sex—none other than the daughter of the kadi." I regarded the girl in amazed wonderment, thinking that perhaps I had to deal with a mad woman. She understood my look and continued: "I am not mad, my good Captain, except as it may be said that all who love are mad. As for my affection, that is a mystery of passion we cannot plumb. My feelings are returned by the kadi's daughter and we were, in fact, inseparable companions until, one day, her father locked up his daughter and threatened to break my hands and feet if I ventured again into his dwelling. I have not seen my loved one since, but I have learnt that she is well-nigh mad because of our separation. It is to ease my heart and bring a little joy to her that I have called on you, O captain."

As I looked at this incomparable child and heard what she said, my brain became clouded and I exclaimed in my soul: "O Allah, Allah, your mysteries are past understanding. You have tied about each man's neck the cord of his destiny, but some indeed are passing strange." I beat my hands together in surprise and cried aloud: "Dear mistress, I understand nothing of what you have said. Can you not explain it to me more clearly?" She was quiet for a moment and I could see that grave thoughts were troubling her mind. Then she answered: "Be quiet, for this is a mystery of love."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-thirty-eighth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

"IT IS ENOUGH for you to know that I need your help to reach the kadi's house and that, when you have aided me, I will never forget my obligation." "Well, well, good Muin," said I to myself, "so you have been chosen for the go-between of two women! There was never such a tale in all the history of pimping! At least, there is no law against it, you may go forward!" So I cleared my throat, and said to the gilded woman: "This seems a delicate matter, my pigeon; but the less I understand of it the more ready I am to help you. Yet I confess I do not see how I can be of any use." "I wish you to help me into the presence of my loved one," she explained. "That is all very well, my dove," I replied, "but here am I, as it might be, here, and there is the daughter of the kadi, as it might be, there." At this she cried fretfully: "Poor fool, do you think I would be so rash as to let you come near the sweet one in your own person? I only need you as a stick upon the road to ruse and stratagem." "Behold a stick both blind and deaf, my lamb," I murmured, and she went on: "Listen, then! Tonight I will go, dressed up like a peacock in all my best and so veiled that none at all may recognise me, and seat myself near the kadi's house. When you come along with your guards, the perfume which I shall be wearing will attract you and you will come up to me respectfully to ask what so noble a lady does alone in the street at that hour. To this I shall reply: 'O valiant captain, I am a girl from the citadel; my father is one of the sultan's emirs. Today I came down into the city to do some shopping, but before I had finished the gates of the citadel had been shut against me. I walked down again, hoping to find some friend with whom I could spend the night; but by ill-luck not one of them is at home. As a last resort I came to sit near the threshold of the kadi's house that his shadow might in some sort protect me. Tomorrow

I shall return to my parents.' Then you, O Captain Muin, as an intelligent and observant man, will say to yourself: 'It is not lawful to leave a woman in the street when she is young and beautiful and covered with jewels, for she may be outraged and robbed. If such a thing were to happen in my quarter I would be responsible to the sultan. No, I must protect her in some way; I must set one of my men to guard her, or, better still (for you know what policemen are!) find her a lodging with respectable folk until the morning. By Allah, I have it! Where could she be safer than in the kadi's house? She sought it out instinctively, poor lamb. Lodge her with the kadi, my fine fellow, and, in one of two ways, you are sure to be rewarded.' Then you must knock at the kadi's door and, in a minute or so, I shall be beside my loved one in the harem. Such is my plan, O captain."

"Allah increase His favours upon your head, O mistress!" I answered, "The scheme is clever, and the more so because it is easy. Intelligence is a gift from God." Then, when I had agreed with her upon our time of meeting, I kissed her hand and went my way.

Evening came and then night; soon after the hour of prayer I set out on my round, followed by my policemen, bearing naked swords. After passing through many districts, we visited, at about midnight, the road where I expected to meet my lady of strange loves. Even as I turned the corner, a rich and astonishing perfume was wafted out to me, and presently I heard the tinkling of bracelets and anklets. "I see a shadow there, my sons!" I shouted, "And what a smell!" We all peered into the gloom and soon saw a veiled figure, heavy with brocade and bright with silk. At once I went forward and addressed the shape respectfully, saying: "O my mistress, what does a fair and high-born lady alone at such an hour? Are you not afraid of the night and the violence of thieves?" She answered me according to our plan, and I turned towards my men, as if to ask their advice. "O chief," said they, "if such be your wish, we will conduct this lady to your house, for she will be better there than anywhere. We do not think that you will lose by giving her hospitality, as she is both rich and beautiful. When you join her there, you can act as seems good to you, and, in the morning, restore her to her loving mother." But I cried out: "Be quiet! I take refuge in Allah against such a suggestion! For one thing, I live far from here; and, for another, my poor abode is quite unworthy of an emir's daughter. No, my best plan will be to ask hospitality for her from the kadi, whose house is both handy and suitable." At once my ruffians began to knock upon the kadi's door, and, in a moment or so, the judge appeared in person, leaning upon the shoulders of two black slaves. After greeting, I explained the affair to the old man, while the girl stood meekly to one side, with her veils drawn close about her. "She is welcome!" answered the kadi, "My daughter will entertain her and see that she lacks for nothing." At once I handed over my incendiary package and, as she was being led to the harem, went forth again upon my round.

Next morning, as I walked towards the kadi's house to take possession of the goods, I said to myself: "By Allah, it must have been a white night for those two girls! Yet, in very truth, my brain would crack before I could imagine what two gazelles like that could do between them. I have never heard tell of such a thing." Busy with these thoughts, I turned into the entrance of the house and fell among an extraordinary tumult and buzzing of frightened slaves and clamorous women. As I halted in amazement, the white-haired old kadi hurled himself towards me, crying: "O shame of good-for-nothings! You planted a thief in my house last night and she has made off with all my fortune! Unless you find her, I will bring you up before the sultan to taste of his red death!" I asked for further details, and he explained, in an outpour of menaces and curses, that the girl had disappeared from his harem early in the morning and that a belt containing six thousand dinars had vanished with her. "I hold you responsible!" he cried; and again: "I hold you responsible!"

At first, my lord, I was too thunderstruck to speak; I bit the palm of my hand, thinking: "O pimp, this lands you in the pitch for good and all! Where the devil is that girl?" Then I plucked up my courage, and said to the kadi: "Good master, if this thing has happened, it was because it was fated. I only ask you to allow me three days in which to lay hands upon that prodigious female; if I do not succeed, you may have my head for all I care." The kadi looked at me searchingly and then answered: "I give you three days, but not a minute longer."

I left his presence with my brain in a whirl, saying to myself: "You have done it this time, you clumsy fool! How are you going to recognise one out of all the veiled women in Cairo? How can you examine the harems when you are not allowed to enter them? You might just as well go to bed for your three days of grace, since there is no way of evading your responsibilities." When I had made this decision, I went home and lay down on my mat, where I stayed sleepless for three days, mourning over my fate. At the time appointed, I rose and took my way with bended head towards the kadi's house; but, as I was passing through a street not far from it, I happened to look up, and saw the maiden of my troubles behind a half-opened lattice. She looked at me with laughing eyes and signed with her brows, as much as to say: ''Come up to me!'' I did not need a second invitation, as I knew that my life depended upon this meeting; in the twinkling of an eye I stood beside her, and, quite unmindful of any salutation, cried briskly: ''My sister, I have hunted every corner of the city for you. Do you realise that you have played me a mean trick? Do you realise that you have made me descend the red stairs of very death?'' She came to me and pressed me to her bosom, saying: ''Can Captain Muin be afraid? Do not waste time in telling me what has happened, for I know all. It is true that I have waited till the last moment, but I can easily save you. I called you up to me for nothing else.'' I thanked her cordially and could not refrain, because she was beautiful, from kissing the hand which had done me so much harm. ''Be at ease,'' she said, when I had done this, ''for no ill shall come to you. Rise up now and look!'' She led me by the hand into an adjoining chamber which contained two chests; one was filled with rubies and every other colour of rare jewel, the other was stuffed to the brim with gold pieces. ''If you like, Captain Muin, you can take back the six thousand dinars which disappeared with the belt of that black-souled kadi, my sweet one's father,'' said this mysterious lady, ''but I think they can be put to a better use. I only took them away because I knew that the old man was a miser, and I hoped that he would die of grieving. When one is as rich as I am, one does not steal. His daughter knows very well that I was only aiming at his life. Listen carefully and I will show you a way by which you can clear yourself and, at the same time, help on my plans for that vile old creature's death.'' She paused for a moment, and then continued: ''The kadi will be waiting for you on the hot grill of impatience. You must go to him at once, and say: 'Simply as a matter of duty I have searched for three days through the city, to see if I could find the woman to whom you gave hospitality at my suggestion, and whom you accuse of having stolen six thousand dinars. But I know for a fact that the poor creature never left this house. None of the police can find one trace of her since that evening, and none of the female spies have been able to get news of her in any harem. You accuse her, my lord, of having robbed you; yet I think that such an accusation should be proved; for it seems very much more likely to me that the girl was the object of some vile plot, or the victim of some foul assault while under your care. Allah knows all, but I consider it my duty to make a perquisition in your house, in case this thief of yours did not quite escape!'

''Thus, Captain Muin, from being the accused you will have become the accuser. The kadi will see the world grow black before his eyes, he will fly into a great rage, his face will grow like a peppercorn, and he will cry: 'You dare to accuse me, you dog; but it shall avail you nothing! Begin your perquisition at once. After you have proved yourself in the wrong, your punishment will be the greater.' Then you must take your men as witnesses, and make a thorough search of the house, though, needless to say, you will find nothing. When you have scrutinised every inch of the terrace, when you have rummaged every room and chest in the place, you must lower your head in cruel embarrassment and, as soon as you have reached the kitchen, begin to confound yourself in excuses. As you are stammering out your contrition, you must lift the cover from the great oil jar, which you will see there, and cast a careless glance inside. Suddenly you will cry: 'Oh, oh, one moment, one moment! What have we here?' You will thrust your arm into the jar, and feel a packet thrust well down below the oil. You must bring this forth, and there, for all the world to see, will be my veil, my chemise, my drawers, and all the rest of my garments reeking with coagulated blood! You will be triumphant and the kadi confounded. He will become yellow, and his joints will turn to water; he will certainly fall to the floor and, if Allah be good to us, he may die. If he does not die on the spot he will be ready to do anything to keep his name out of this disreputable business, and will gladly bribe you heavily to suppress your finding. That is my plan, good Captain Muin."

For a moment I was dazzled and dumbfounded by the brilliance of this scheme and the charm of its inventor; when at last I had sufficiently recovered myself to take my leave, the girl slipped a purse of a hundred dinars between my fingers, as I was kissing her hand, and said: "These are for the expenses of today. But, if Allah wills, you shall have better proof of my generosity in the future." I thanked her warmly and added, before I could prevent myself: "Dear mistress, when this business is finished to your satisfaction, will it please you to marry me?" "You have forgotten that I am already betrothed to her who holds my heart, good captain," she answered with a laugh, "But Allah alone knows the future! Depart now, my friend, in His name!"

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-thirty-ninth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

I WENT FORTH, blessing her, and led my men to the kadi's house. As soon as the old man saw me, he cried: "Here is my debtor, but where is the amount of the debt?" "O our lord, the kadi," I answered, "my head is as nothing when weighed against your head, and I have no one to sustain me in any high position; but, if the right is on my side, Allah will show it forth!" "What is this talk of right?" shouted the kadi furiously, "Do you think that anything can save you from your fate, if you have not found the woman and my belt? By Allah, there is a great gulf fixed between you and any question of right!" On this I looked the old man very bravely in the eyes and brought forth the astonishing rigmarole which turned me from accused into accuser. The effect of my words was exactly as the girl had foreseen: the kadi saw the world darken before his eyes, his breast became stuffed to bursting with anger, his face took on the appearance of a pimento, and he cried: "What are these lies, O most insolent of all the police? Such disgusting insinuations will serve you nothing! Make your perquisition, in Allah's name, for when it leads to nothing, your punishment will be the greater!" So saying, he went into an irruption, as if he had been a red-hot cockpot suddenly filled with water.

We laid aboard his house and rummaged high and low, not letting the least corner, chest, hole, or cupboard escape us. As we carried on this business, I saw that sweet gazelle, who was loved of her own kind, flit from chamber to chamber to escape us. "The name of Allah be upon her and about her!" I murmured to myself, "A reed, a wavering reed! All elegance and all beauty! Blessed be the womb which bore her, and thrice glorified the Creator who moulded her in the mould of perfection!" I understood for the first time how such a girl might subjugate another of her like, and I murmured: "Sometimes the rose will lean towards the rose, the jonquil to the jonquil." I was so delighted by this discovery that I wished to run with it at once to the prodigious damsel, whose business I was now about, so that she might approve me and no longer think me lacking in delicacy and discernment.

We came at length to the kitchen, without finding a trace of the missing woman or any suspicious thing at all, and, by this time, the kadi's fury had no bounds.

Here I acted upon my instruction and, feigning great shame for my boldness, humbled myself in excuses before the kadi, who rejoiced in my embarrassment. A silly fly who could not see the web, he triumphed over me saying: "Insolent liar, son of a liar, and breeder of liars! Where are your threats now? Where is this body of which we have heard so much? Perhaps we will find her before the sultan's throne!" During this speech I stood against the large unstoppered oil-jar, with my head bent over it in an attitude of contrition. Suddenly I threw up my chin, and cried: "As Allah lives, I may be wrong, but I seem to smell blood in this jar!" I plunged my hand into the oil and drew it forth, exclaiming: "Allah akbar! Allah akbar! Behold!" and I displayed before the eyes of the kadi and my men the packet which my ingenious friend had left in the jar before she went away. It contained her veil, her head kerchief, her breast kerchief, her drawers, her chemise, her slippers, with other linens which I do not recall, and all were covered with blood.

As the girl had foreseen, the kadi was stricken down by the sight of these things; his face became yellow, his joints turned to water, and he fell head over heels to the floor in a swoon. When I had brought him round, I thought it was my turn to triumph, and so said: "O our lord the kadi, which of us is the liar now? I can at least thank Allah that I am cleared from all suspicion of theft, from connivance with the poor young dead. But I do not see how all his wisdom and all his jurisprudence is going to help the kadi! Oh, how could you, a rich man nourished in the laws, reconcile your conscience to such a hideous crime? How could a judge rob and murder a young girl, after, I make no doubt, violating her in the most shameful manners? The sultan must hear of this at once, for if I failed to do my duty and kept silence, the thing would be sure to come out, and I should lose my office and my head."

The unfortunate kadi stood before me, with round starting eyes, as if he heard and understood nothing of all this. His agony had stricken him as motionless as a dead tree. Night was upon his spirit, and it was long before he could distinguish his right hand from his left, and say to me: "Good Captain Muin, this is a most obscure affair, and Allah alone can understand it. But, if you can find it in your duty not to noise the thing aboard, you shall in no sort lose by that." He fawned upon me and thrust into my arms a sack holding as many dinars as he had lost. Thus he bought my silence and extinguished a fire, which might have been fatal to him, while it was still small.

I left him more dead than alive and ran with my news to the girl, who received me with a ripple of laughter, and said to me: "Now it is certain that he cannot live much longer." And, in fact, my lord, three days had not passed before I learned that the kadi had died by rupturing his gall bladder. When I went to carry these joyful tidings to the strange lady, I heard from the servants that their mistress had already departed for a property which she owned on the Nile near Tantah, and had taken the kadi's daughter with her. On looking back, I marvelled at that which had passed and, as I still could not understand what two gazelles could do, I made many unsuccessful attempts to get upon their track. I have not yet quite lost hope of hearing news from them, a few words which will instruct me further in this curious love making.

Such is my story, O my lord the sultan, the strangest adventure which ever came to me in the exercise of those duties with which your royal confidence invested me.

When Captain Muin Al-Din had made an end of his tale, a second policeman advanced between the hands of Sultan Bibars, and, after greeting, said: "O our lord the sultan, I also will tell you of an adventure which happened to me personally, and, if Allah wishes, it will delight you." Then he said:

THE SECOND CAPTAIN'S TALE

Before accepting me as a husband, O sultan, my cousin (Allah have her in His mercy!) said: "Let us marry by all means, if such is God's will, but remember that I can only accept you if you agree in advance to the three conditions which I am about to make." "I see no objection to that," I answered, "But what are the conditions?" Then said she: "You must never take hashish, you must never eat water-melon, and you must never sit on a chair." "Your conditions are very hard, my cousin," I replied, "but, though I do not understand them, I accept them." "That is well," she exclaimed, "for they are hard and fast."

We were married, and all passed as it should. For many years we lived together in tranquil unity. But a day came when my spirit began to be tortured to know the reason of my wife's three conditions, and I said to myself: "What possible object can she have in forbidding three things which are quite usual and harmless? There is a mystery in the matter which I would give my eyes to penetrate." As my desire was as great as my curiosity, I entered straightway into the shop of one of my friends, and, as a beginning, sat down in a straw-stuffed chair; then I called for a fine cool water-melon and ate it greedily; and, finally, I absorbed a grain of hashish in the last of the fruit, and sent my soul in search of fortunate dreams. Because of the hashish my soul knew perfect happiness, because of the water-melon my stomach found felicity, and my poor bottom, after all these hard years, discovered ecstasy because of the stuffed chair. But, O sultan, when I returned home, the band began to play. As soon as she saw me, my wife jumped up and drew her veil across her face, as if I had been a perfect stranger: she looked blackly upon me, and cried: "O dog, and son of a dog, is this the way you keep your promises? Come with me at once to the kadi, for I insist upon divorce!" As my brain was still exalted by the hashish, my belly still pleasantly heavy with the water-melon, and my haunches delightfully rested by the stuffed chair, I boldly denied my three transgressions; but, at my first ''No!'' the woman exclaimed: ''Hold your tongue, O pimp! Do you expect me not to believe the evidence of my own senses? You stink of hashish, your clothes are covered with droppings of water-melon, and you have pressed your dark and dirty bum so hard upon a chair that the straws have left visible lines about your skirts. Henceforth we are nothing to each other!''

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-fortieth Night
Had Come

She said:

She drew her veils about her and dragged me to the kadi's court. When we were in the presence, she cried out: ''O our lord the kadi, your servant was legally married to this abject, here, and, before the ceremony, he swore to observe certain conditions. For some time he kept his oath, but now he has broken it, and I demand divorce, together with the return of my dowry and my clothes.'' The kadi asked to be told the three conditions, and my wife enumerated them. ''Now this gallows-child has sat on a chair,'' she added, ''has eaten a water-melon, and taken hashish.'' Then she brought forward her proofs, and they were so peremptory that I had not the heart to deny them.

But the kadi had a kind soul and pitied me; therefore, before giving his decree, he said to my wife: ''O daughter of excellent parents, you are within your rights, but it would well become you to be merciful.'' Then, as the woman declared in a tempest of words that she would not listen to this plea, the kadi, and all who were by him, tried to persuade her to postpone action until she had had time to reflect. They spoke so feelingly that at last my wife, though ready to argue all day, consented to reconciliation with me, on condition that the kadi would find the answer to a question which she had in mind to put to him. ''I am agreeable,'' answered the kadi, ''Ask your question, my good woman.'' Then said my wife: ''First I am a bone, then I am a muscle, and finally I am flesh. What am I?'' The kadi stroked his beard and reflected for a long time, then he looked at his questioner again, saying: ''Today I am so wearied by my long session that I cannot answer even the simplest question; but this evening I will consult my books of jurisprudence and, if you care to return tomorrow morning, will have the answer ready for you.''

Soon he dismissed all his pleaders and returned to his house, where he became so immersed in the problem that he forgot the meal which his daughter, a girl of fourteen and a half, had set before him. ''First I am a bone,'' he kept on saying half aloud to himself, ''first I am a bone, then I am a muscle, and finally I am flesh. What am I? Yes, by Allah, what am I? Yes, yes, what is he? Yes, yes, yes, what is it, in Allah's name?'' He searched through his books of jurisprudence, his grammars, and his library of medical works, but could find no hint of an answer and no shadow of a hint of an answer. At last he cried: ''I give it up! There seems to have been no book written on the subject!''

His daughter, who had noticed his preoccupation and heard these last words, questioned him, saying: "What is the matter, dear father? Why do you groan and rumple your hair?" "Because I see no issue to a certain problem, my child," answered the kadi. "Tell me about it," urged the little girl, "for nothing is impossible to the wisdom of Allah." So the kadi told her the whole story and repeated my wife's question. "O father, do you call that difficult?" cried his daughter with a laugh, "It is as easy as running water. Think for yourself, father, upon the state of man through his ages. Does he not meet the first condition between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five, the second between the thirty-fifth and sixtieth year, and, surely, when he is passed sixty he adequately fulfils the third condition. That is the answer to the riddle."

The kadi rejoiced, saying: "Glory be to Allah who gives intelligence to the meanest of his people! You have not only saved my honour, O daughter of benediction, but you have prevented the disruption of a loving family." He rose impatiently at dawn and ran to the courthouse, where he had to wait for a long time before my wife appeared, dragging me with her. "O our lord the kadi," said my wife, "do you remember my question and have you found the answer?" "Glory be to Allah, who gave me light!" exclaimed the kadi, "O daughter of excellent parents, your question was too easy; everybody knows that the first is the ardent young lover from fifteen to thirty-five; the second is the sedate husband between thirty-five and sixty; the final state is the old man."

My wife, who recognised the subtlety of the daughter in this, easily guessed what had happened, and answered slyly: "As Allah lives, many who have grown old in the trade could not have done so well! I congratulate you most heartily upon your daughter, my lord! She is only fourteen and a half, but her head is twice as old. I think we may say that her future is assured."

She signed to me to follow her and quitted the court, leaving the kadi in a vast confusion from which he did not recover for the rest of his days.

When he had thus spoken, the second policeman returned to his place, and Sultan Bibars said to him: "The tale is strange! The mysteries of Allah are unfathomable!" Then the third captain, whose name was Ez Al-Din, came forward and kissed the earth before the throne, saying: "O king of time, in all my life nothing has happened to me that I consider worthy to be brought to the ears of my lord. But I can tell him a tale which is no less pleasing and prodigious than a personal adventure." And he said:

THE THIRD CAPTAIN'S TALE

My mother knew a great many stories of the past, and this was one of them:

There dwelt in a country near to the salt sea a fisherman, who was happily married to a very beautiful wife. Every day he would cast his net and, by selling his catch, earn just enough to feed them both. Once, when he fell ill, there was no food in the house for the whole day; so, on the following morning, his wife said to him: "If you cannot fish, how are we going to live? If you care to rise up now, I will carry your net and your basket, and you shall direct me how to fish. If we only take two little ones, we shall be able to buy supper." The fisherman agreed to this suggestion and, rising from his bed, made his slow way to a part of the shore at the foot of the sultan's palace, which he knew to be fertile in fishes. His wife followed him, carrying the basket and the net.

As they walked, the sultan was watching the sea from his window. When he saw the fisherman's beautiful wife and had feasted his eyes upon her, he felt himself moved with desire. So he called his grand wazir to him, saying: "O wazir, I have fallen violently in love with that fisherman's wife. There is not her equal for beauty in all my palace." "The business is a delicate one, O king of time," answered the wazir. "What shall we do?" "At least we shall not hesitate," replied the sultan, "Bid the guards seize the man and kill him, and then I shall be able to marry his widow." But the wazir, who was a judicious man, objected, saying: "It is not lawful for you to put him to death, unless you can bring some fault against him. People will accuse you of injustice, and say that you valued a woman more than the life of her husband." "That is true," agreed the sultan, "but how else shall I reach to my desire?" "There is a lawful way," answered the wazir after reflection, "You know that the audience hall of the palace is an acre long by an acre broad. Well, I shall summon the fisherman thither and command him, on pain of death, to cover the whole floor with a single-piece carpet. He will not be able to do this, and we can kill him without any of the people suspecting another motive." "Good, good," replied the sultan.

The wazir sent at once for the fisherman and led him into the hall, where the sultan waited. "O fisherman," he said, "our master the king requires you to cover the floor of this hall with one carpet, woven in a single piece. He allows you three days, and, if in that time you do not bring the carpet, you shall be burnt in the fire. Write an agreement to this effect and seal it with your seal.'' ''That is all very well,'' replied the fisherman, ''but do you think that I am a man of carpets? I am a man of fish. Ask for every color and variety of fish and I will bring them to you, but as for carpets, as Allah lives, they do not know me and I do not know them, not even the smell of them! If it were a question of fish, I would gladly write an undertaking and seal it.'' ''Enough of idle words!'' cried the wazir, ''The king has commanded this thing.'' ''Then seal it yourself, in Allah's name!'' exclaimed the fisherman, ''Seal it a hundred times if you like!'' With that he beat his hands together and ran from the palace in a great rage.

''What has annoyed you?'' asked his wife, when he rejoined her. ''Be quiet,'' he answered, ''Instead of vexing me with your babble, make our clothes into a bundle, for we must flee from this land.'' ''Why?'' she asked, and he replied: ''Because the king wishes to kill me in three days.'' ''How is that?'' she asked again; and for answer, he told her of the carpet. ''Is that all?'' she demanded, ''For if it is you may sleep in peace. I myself will bring you the carpet tomorrow, and you will have nothing to do but spread it out in the king's hall.'' ''It needed but this!'' cried the exasperated fisherman, ''Have you gone mad, like the wazir?'' But his wife answered: ''Since you seem anxious, you can have the carpet today. Listen carefully: go out towards the gardens and you will find a crooked tree which overhangs a well; put your head over the side, and call: 'O So-and-So, your dear friend Such-and-Such gives you greeting and begs you to send her the spindle which she forgot yesterday. We wish to carpet a room with it.' '' ''Oh, very well,'' replied the fisherman.

He walked to the well beneath the twisted tree, and cried down into it: "O So-and-So, your dear friend Such-and-Such gives you greeting and begs you to send her the spindle which she forgot yesterday. We wish to carpet a room with it." Then that which was in the well (Allah alone could describe her more fully!) called up in answer: "How could I refuse anything to my dear friend? Here is the spindle! When you have finished with it, bring it back to me." The fisherman caught the spindle, as it was thrown up out of the well, and, placing it in his pocket, returned home. "The woman has made me as mad as she is!" he muttered as he went along; but, when he came into the presence of his wife, he said: "Here is the spindle." "Good," she answered, "Now go to this calamitous wazir and ask him for a large nail. When he gives it to you, you must drive it into the floor at one end of the hall and fasten the thread of the spindle to it. Then, as you move away, the carpet will unfold itself." At these words, the fisherman lost confidence, and cried: "Do you want people to laugh at me and take me for a fool before I die?" But his wife grew angry, and retorted: "Be quiet and do as I say!" So the fisherman carried the spindle to the palace, and as he went, murmured to himself: "There is no power or might save in Allah! This is the last day of your life, O most unfortunate man!"

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-forty-first Night
Had Come

She said:

When he came into the presence, the wazir asked him where the carpet might be, and he answered that it was in his pocket. Both the wazir and the sultan burst out laughing at this, and said to each other: "Here is a man who jests before his death!" Also the wazir mocked, and asked: "Is an acre of carpet to be carried in the pocket like a child's doll?" "What is that to you?" replied the fisherman, "You asked for a carpet and I have brought you a carpet. There the matter ends. If, instead of laughing at me, you would stir your stumps and get me a large nail, I could spread the carpet at once and go my way."

As the wazir rose with a smile and fetched the nail, he whispered to the sultan's executioner: "Stay here, near the door, and, when the fisherman fails to lay the carpet, strike off his head without waiting for further orders." The sword-bearer bowed, and the wazir handed the nail to the fisherman, saying: "Now let us see the carpet!"

The fisherman hammered in the nail at the end of the hall and fastened the beginning of the thread to it; then he started to turn the spindle, saying: "Spin my death, vile thing!" But lo! a magnificent carpet began to stretch out from the nail and had soon covered the whole space of the floor with a fabric of unequalled beauty. The king and the wazir looked at each other in stupefaction for a whole hour, while the fisherman stood before them calmly and in silence. At length the wazir winked at the king in knowing fashion, and said to the fisherman: "The king is content with this, but he has another thing to ask. He requires you to bring to him a little boy not more than eight days old, and he insists that the little boy shall tell him a story which is a tissue of lies from beginning to end."

"Is that all?" cried the fisherman, "That will be quite easy, if you will be so good as to place the new-born children of all the Jinn at my disposition!" "Be quiet!" answered the wazir, "The word and the desire of the king must have their course. We give you eight days in which to find the child, but, if you fail, you shall most certainly taste red death before our eyes. Write out an agreement to this effect and set your seal to it." "Here is my seal, but I do not know how to use it," objected the fisherman, "I know something of fish and something of carpets, but of seals and lying babies I know nothing. Put a hundred seals to the thing if you like! As for me, I put my trust in Allah." The wazir took the seal and set it to the agreement, while the fisherman ran out of the palace in a royal rage.

When he came into his wife's presence, he cried: "Rise up now, for we must flee from this land. I told you once and you would not listen to me. Rise up now, for I am off." "But why?" she asked, "Did no carpet come from the spindle?" "The carpet came," he answered, "but that pimp, that wazir of my arse, that son of a bitch, now insists that I shall provide him with a little boy, less than eight days old, and that the boy shall tell the sultan a tale filled with lies from beginning to end. Out of his great generosity he has given me eight days in which to do the thing." "Good," said his wife, "we at least have time in which to concoct a plan."

On the ninth morning the fisherman said to his wife: "Have you forgotten about the little boy? This is the final day!" "Then I will tell you what to do," she answered, "Go to the well beneath the twisted tree. Then, after you have given back the spindle with a few words of polite thanks, you must say: "O So-and-So, your dear friend Such-and-Such sends you greeting and begs you to lend her the boy who was born yesterday, for we have need of him in a certain matter.''

''As Allah lives,'' cried the fisherman, ''unless it be that pitch-faced wazir, I know no more perfect fool than you! He at least permits the child to be eight days old, but you insist on lowering my chances by seven days.'' ''That is no concern of yours,'' she answered tartly, ''Go, and do as I say!'' ''Very well,'' he grumbled, as he left the house, ''since you want me out of the way, this is as good a plan as any.''

When he came to the well, he threw the spindle into it, calling down: ''Here is the spindle!'' Then he added: ''O So-and-So, your dear friend Such-and-Such sends you greeting and begs you to lend her the boy who was born yesterday, for we have need of him in a certain matter. And for Allah's sake be quick, for my head is not steady upon my shoulders!'' Then that which was in the well (Allah alone can describe her more fully!) called up in answer: ''Take the child, and say over him the words against the evil eye.'' So the fisherman took the child which was handed up to him and said: ''In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate!''

As he went his way with the infant, he thought: ''Surely the children of the most powerful Jinn, even when they have reached their thirtieth day, could not talk and tell such tales as are required from this little one.'' To set his doubts at rest, he spoke to the swathed bundle in his arms, saying: ''Come, my child, talk to me a little, for I wish to know whether or not this is the day of my death.'' Hearing his loud voice, the boy became frightened and, contracting both his face and belly, did after the manner of all bantlings; that is to say, he wept with terrible grimaces and pissed to the full extent of his power. The fisherman was both soaked and angry when he came into his wife's presence. ''Here is the child,'' he said, ''but Allah protect me from such children! The little devil knows how to cry and piss, but that is the extent of his wisdom. My garment is spoilt for ever.'' ''That is no concern of yours,'' answered his wife, ''Pray for the Prophet, O man, and do exactly as I tell you. Carry this infant to the sultan, and you will soon see whether he can talk or not. Only be sure to demand three cushions for him, and, when you have set him on the middle of a couch, put one on each side of him and one at his back. Also pray for the Prophet.'' So the fisherman answered: ''On him be prayer and peace!'' and went his way, with the child in his arms.

When the wazir saw the fisherman arrive with his swaddled burden, he broke into a laugh, and addressed the infant in such tones as are used when speaking to a baby. ''There's a pretty!'' he said; but, instead of speaking, the child screwed up his nose and mouth, and made a noise like: ''Mees! mees!'' The wazir ran in delight to the king, and whispered to him: ''I have spoken to the child but he has not answered; instead he has wept and made a noise like: 'Mees! mees!' The fisherman is nearing his end. Now only remains for us to put him to confusion before all the emirs and notables, and then cut off his head.''

The sultan immediately summoned all his emirs and notables, and accompanied his wazir into the hall of justice. When all were in their places, the fisherman was introduced, and the wazir, after reading aloud the sealed agreement, bade him bring forward the child. ''First I must have three cushions,'' said the fisherman, ''then you shall hear what you shall hear.'' Three cushions were brought, and the unfortunate man, after setting the baby in the middle of a couch, consolidated him with them. "Is this the child who is going to tell us our tissue of lies?' asked the king.

Before the fisherman had time to answer, the one-day-old child remarked: "Before all, greeting, O king!" Amid an astonished silence, the no less astonished king returned this salutation, and said: "Now, O Learned, I beg you to tell me some story which shall be one jam of lies." "Once, when I was in the prime of my young manhood," began the child forthwith, "I walked in the fields outside the city during the heat of the day, and because I was thirsty, bought a water-melon from a man for one gold dinar. When I had cut a slice and swallowed it with great delight, I looked inside the melon and saw there a city complete with its citadel. Without hesitating, I stepped over the rim, one leg at a time, and found myself inside the fruit. For a long time I wandered, looking at the shops and houses, until I came at length to the suburban fields. There I saw a date tree bearing a multitude of dates, each an ell long, and, as I hungered for dates, I climbed up into the tree to eat a few. But I found a quantity of peasants sowing seed among the dates, and cutting the ears, and flailing and husking the corn. I passed by these and met a man who was beating eggs upon a threshing-floor; as I watched him, I noticed chickens coming out of the eggs as they were beaten flat. The little cocks walked off to one side and the little hens to the other. At once I married the little cocks and the little hens, and, leaving them content, walked off along another branch. Soon I met a donkey, carrying a load of sesame cakes, and, being extremely partial to such things, helped myself to one of them. But as soon as I had swallowed it down, I found myself outside the water-melon and beheld the fruit close and become complete as it had been before. Such is my story, O Sultan."

Hearing such words from one swaddled and newly born, the king cried out: "Oh, ho, ho! O sheikh and crown of liars! Oh, ho, ho, my Learned, I swear there is not one word of truth in what you have said! Do you really think that we believe a single syllable of that devilish tale? Allah, Allah! Since when have there been cities inside water-melons, since when have chickens come out of eggs which have been beaten flat on a threshing-floor? Confess, O Learned, that you made the whole thing up." "I confess nothing and I deny nothing," answered the child, "Neither should you, O king, deny the real reason for your persecution of this fisherman. You wish to kill him because you saw his beautiful wife on the strand and lusted after her. Was this worthy of one rich in kingship? I swear, by Allah and the virtues of the Prophet (upon whom be prayer and peace!) that, if you do not leave this man and his wife in quiet from now on, I shall so cleanse the world of men from you and your wazir that not even the flies shall find a trace of you."

When he had spoken these things in a terrifying voice, the child turned to the fisherman, saying: "Now, uncle, take me up and carry me back to your house." The fisherman took up little Learned and left the palace, no man staying him. As soon as he arrived home and told his wife of what had happened, she bade him take back the baby to the well, with many thanks; and this he did. When the infant had been received by that which dwelt in the well beneath the crooked tree, the fisherman returned to his house, and, after ablution and prayer, did his usual with his delightful wife. After that time they lived together in prosperity and peace. So much for them.

When he had made an end of this tale, the third captain of police returned to his place, and Sultan Bibars said: "An excellent story! But it was a pity, O Ez Al-Din, that you had no further complication to tell us, no later strife between the sultan and the fisherman." Then the fourth captain, whose name was Muhi Al-Din, came forward, saying: "O king, if you will give me leave, I will tell you the rest of that tale; for the end is more astonishing than the beginning." "With all my heart!" cried Sultan Bibars; and Muhi said:

THE FOURTH CAPTAIN'S TALE

O KING OF TIME, a man child was born to that fisherman and his fair wife, and they called him Muhamad Learned, in memory of the miraculous infant who had saved them upon a certain day. And the son was as beautiful as his mother.

The sultan also had a son of the same age; but he was ugly, and as dark in the face as any hind.

The two children went to the same school to learn to read and write, and, when the king's son, who was lazy and in a low class, saw the fisherman's son, who was studious and in a high class, he would say to him: "Good morning, O fisherman's son!" Knowing that this was intended as an affront, little Muhamad Learned would answer: "Good morning, O king's son! May your face be whitened, for it is as black as the strap of an old clog." For a year the two children saluted each other in this way every morning, and at last, in a fit of rage, the king's son told his father that the fisherman's son ever drew attention to the fact that his face was as black as the strap of an old clog. The sultan was angry but he dared not himself punish Muhamad, because of what had gone before. Instead, he called the schoolmaster before him, saying: "O sheikh, if you were by chance to kill little Muhamad, the fisherman's son, I would give you a fine present and send you many concubines together with fair white slaves." "My life is yours, O king of time," answered the delighted old man, "I will beat the little scoundrel every day until he dies."

So, when little Learned went to school on the next day, the master bade the rest of his pupils fetch the stick and hold the poor child down. The boys seized Muhamad and, placing his feet in a wooden vice, stretched him out on the ground. Then the master beat him upon the soles, until the blood gushed out and his legs were all inflamed. "You shall have another dose tomorrow, you little blockhead!" he cried. But Muhamad, as soon as he was loosed, fled through the door and ran all the way home. He sought his mother and father, and said to them: "Look, look! The schoolmaster has beaten me almost to death because of the sultan's son! I shall not go to school any more. I want to become a fisherman like my father." The man at once gave him a net and basket, saying: "Very well, my son. Here are the tools of our trade. Tomorrow you may go out and see whether you can earn your keep."

At dawn next morning Muhamad went down and cast his net into the sea; but, when he withdrew it, he found that he had caught only one little red-mullet.

"I shall roast it in its scales," he said, "and eat it for my breakfast." He collected a handful of dry grass and twigs, and, after lighting them, picked up the fish; but the red-mullet opened her mouth, and said: "Do not roast me, Muhamad! I am one of the queens of the sea and, if you will throw me back into the water, I promise to come to your help in any time of trouble." "Very well," replied Muhamad, and he cast the red-mullet back into the sea. So much for her.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-forty-second Night
Had Come

She said:

At the end of two days the sultan called the schoolmaster into his presence, saying: "Have you killed the boy Muhamad?" "I gave him the stick on that first day until he swooned," answered the old man, "Then he fled, and I have not seen him since. I hear that he has turned fisherman like his father." "Begone, you son of a dog!" cried the sultan, "May your father be cursed, may your daughter mate with a pig!"

Then he called his wazir, and said to him: "The boy is not dead. What shall we do?" "I have found a way," answered the wazir, "I have heard tell of a very beautiful girl, who is the daughter of the sultan of Green Country. Her kingdom is seven years' journey from this place. We will summon the fisherman's son, and I shall say to him: 'Our master the sultan has you in his favour and lays great store by your valour. He requires you to go to Green Country and bring back the daughter of its king, for he wishes to marry her and knows that no one can succeed in the quest except yourself.' " "An excellent plan!" exclaimed the sultan, "Let the boy be sent for at once!"

The wazir hailed the protesting Muhamad into the presence, and said to him: "Our master the sultan has you in his favour and sets great store by your valour. He requires you to go to Green Country and bring back the daughter of its king; for he wishes to marry her and knows that no one can succeed in the quest except yourself." "And since when have I known the way to that place?" objected the boy; but the wazir answered: "It is the king's will!" So Muhamad went forth in a rage and told what had happened to his mother. "Walk with your trouble by the riverside, near to where it joins the sea, my son," she said, "and your trouble will stand off from you." At once her son walked with his trouble by the riverside near to where it joined the sea.

As he wandered here and there, the red-mullet came up out of the water, and asked: "Why are you angry, Muhamad Learned?" "Do not ask me," he replied, "for the thing is hopeless. " "Hope is in the hand of Allah," said the fish, "therefore tell me of your trouble." "O red-mullet," answered Muhamad, "that pitch-faced wazir has bidden me set forth in search of the king's daughter of Green Country." Then said the mullet: "There is no difficulty in that. Go at once to the king and tell him that you will undertake the expedition if he builds you a river boat of pure gold at his wazir's expense."

Muhamad went straightway and made this demand of the king, who at once built him a river boat of pure gold at the wazir's expense, and greatly against that person's will. When all was ready, the boy boarded his gold boat and set forth up the river.

His friend, the red-mullet, swam before him, showing his course and leading him by a network of inland waterways, until he came to Green Country. On his arrival he sent the public crier through the streets to cry: "Men, women, and children, all are welcome to come down to the riverside to see the gold boat of Muhamad Learned, the fisherman's son!"

So all the people of that city, great and small, men and women, came down and regarded the gold boat for eight whole days. And the king's daughter, hearing a rumour of this, sought leave of her father, saying: "I wish to go and see the gold boat, like every one else." The king consented and made proclamation that neither man, woman, nor child should leave the house that day, because the princess wished to go and see the gold boat.

When the king's daughter had taken her fill, from the bank, of that delightful sight, she signed to Muhamad to ask if she might come on board and see the interior of his boat; as soon as the boy had given permission with his eyes, she stepped on to the gold deck and began to look about her. But when Learned saw that her attention was well occupied with the bright fittings, he silently lifted the rope and stake, and dropped down stream.

Soon the princess of Green Country wished to go ashore and lifted up her eyes. When she saw that the boat was in motion and had already passed far beyond her father's city, she sought out the mullet's friend, and asked him: "O Learned, whither are you taking me?" "To a king who will be your bridegroom," replied Muhamad. "And is this king handsomer than you, O Learned?" said the girl. "I do not know," he answered, "Soon you will be able to see for yourself." At this she drew a ring from her finger and threw it into the stream (but the red-mullet took it in her mouth and swam on to show the way) and said with a smile: "I will never marry anyone but you. I give myself to you freely now." So Muhamad accepted her most pleasant gifts and rejoiced with her upon the water.

When they came to their destination, the fisherman's son sought out the king, and said to him: "I have brought you the daughter of the sultan of Green Country; but she says that she will not come out of the boat until you stretch a green carpet for her to walk on from the river to the palace. She will walk upon it in great beauty and grace." "Be it so," answered the sultan; and he bought, at the expense of the wazir and much against that person's will, all the green silk carpets in all the markets, and spread them from the palace to the boat.

Then the princess of Green Country came down, clothed all in green, out of the gold boat, and walked, with gentle balancing, over the green silk carpets, so that the king saw her and desired her. As soon as she reached the palace, he said: "I will have our marriage contract written out this evening." "If you wish to marry me," answered the princess, "you must first bring me the ring which fell from my hand into the river, while I was being carried to you."

But the red-mullet had already given this ring to Muhamad Learned, the fisherman's son.

The king called his wazir to him, saying: "Listen: this lady's ring has fallen into the river and she requires it to be brought to her. What shall we do now? Who shall find it for us?" "Who but Muhamad?" answered the wazir, "For surely he is an Ifrit and given over to evil." This he said in order that the boy might be lost beyond recall.

At once the king sent for Muhamad and bade him find the ring; but Muhamad held it out, saying: "That is easy."

As he returned the ring to the princess, the sultan bade her prepare for the marriage. "I am ready," she answered. "But in our country there is a certain custom." "And what custom is that?" asked the king. "They dig a ditch from the bridegroom's house down to the sea," she replied, "The ditch is filled with faggots and branches, and these are set on fire. The suitor then casts himself into the trench and walks through it down to the sea, where he bathes before seeking his bride. Thus is he purified both by fire and water. Such is the marriage ceremony of Green Country."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-forty-third Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

BECAUSE HE GREATLY loved the girl, the king ordered a trench to be dug down to the sea, and filled with faggots and branches; then he called his wazir to him, saying: "Tomorrow you must be ready to walk through the fire with me."

On the following morning, when the time came to set light to this strange river, the wazir said to his master: "It would be better for Muhamad, the fisherman's son, to make trial of the flames first. If he comes out unscathed, we can follow him in all confidence." "Good," said the king.

Meanwhile the red-mullet had climbed up on board the gold boat and had said to her friend Muhamad: "If the king bids you throw yourself into the fire, O Learned, you need not be afraid; you have only to plug your ears and breathe the saving words: 'In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate!'"

So, when the king set light to the wood in the trench and bade Muhamad walk through the flames down to the sea, the youth replied: "Be it upon my head and before my eyes!" He plugged his ears and, murmuring the saving words, went down resolutely into the fire. He came out into the sea looking more beautiful than ever, and all the people marvelled at his appearance.

Then said the wazir to the king: "My lord, the flames will make us as handsome as that devil's brat. Therefore let your son go with us, that he may become as fair as we." The king called his son, the ugly child whose face was coloured like the strap of an old clog, and the three took hands upon the trench's brink. They leapt together into the fire and were immediately shrivelled up to ashes.

Then Muhamad Learned, the fisherman's son, sought out the princess of Green Country and married her. He sat upon the throne of the empire, and became both king and sultan. He called his father and mother to him, to share his glory, and all four lived together in harmony and gladness, in prosperity and peace. Glory be to Allah who is the Master of peace and prosperity, the Giver of harmony and gladness!

When Muhi Al-Din had finished this story and been thanked by Sultan Bibars, his place was taken by another policeman, whose name was Nur Al-Din. This man kissed the earth between the sultan's hands, saying: "O our lord and crown upon our head, I will tell you a tale which has not its equal among tales!" And he told:

THE FIFTH CAPTAIN'S TALE

There was once a sultan who called his wazir to him, saying: "O wazir, I require you to have a seal drawn out and engraved which shall have this power over me when I wear it, that, if I am glad, I cannot become angry, and, if I am angry, I cannot rejoice. He who makes the seal must guarantee that it will have this power. And I allow you three days."

The wazir went to the seal makers of that city and required from them a seal according to the specification of the king; but none of them would undertake so difficult a task. So he rose up in a rage, saying to himself: "I will not find it in this city. I must seek elsewhere."

He went out through the gates and walked across the countryside, until he came upon an Arab sheikh thrashing corn in his field. "Peace be with you, O sheikh of the Arabs!" he said, and the man returned his salute, asking: "Where do you go, good sir, in this great heat?" "I go upon the sultan's business," answered the wazir. "What business is that?" demanded the old man; and the wazir said: "I seek a seal which shall have this power, that when the sultan wears it, if he be glad, he cannot become angry, and, if he be angry, he cannot rejoice." "Since that is all your trouble," replied the sheikh, "sit down and I will bring you food."

The Arab went to his daughter Yasmin, and said to her: "O Yasmin, make ready a meal for our guest." "Whence comes he?" she asked; and, when her father told her that the wazir came from the sultan, demanded to know the object of his journey. Therefore the sheikh gave her the story of the seal, but nothing would be gained by repeating it in this place.

Yasmin of the Arabs made a dish with thirty eggs and much sweet butter, which she gave to her father with eight rolls of bread, saying: "Carry this to the stranger and tell him that Yasmin of the Arabs will write his seal for him. Tell him that the month has thirty days, that the sea is full at this hour, and that there are eight days in a week." "Very well," replied the sheikh, and he set forth, with the dish held carefully before him.

As he walked, the melted butter slopped over on to his hand, so he set down the dish and, after wiping his hand with one of the rolls, ate that and also an egg which took his fancy. Then he bore the dish to the wazir, saying: "My daughter, Yasmin of the Arabs, greets you and says that she will write your seal. She also says that the month has thirty days, the sea is full at this hour, and there are eight days in a week." "Let us eat first," answered the wazir, "Afterwards we can consider the meaning of her words."

But, when he had examined the dish and eaten his fill, the wazir said to the Arab: "Tell her that she may write my seal, but that there is one day missing from the month, the sea is dry, and there are only seven days in this week.'' The sheikh carried this message to his daughter and, as soon as she had heard it, she cried: ''Are you not ashamed of yourself, my father? You not only set down the dish on the way and ate one of the eggs and one of the rolls, but you took the dish to our guest without butter.'' ''By Allah, that is true!'' exclaimed her father, ''But the whole thing was an accident.'' Then said Yasmin of the Arabs: ''Let us prepare the seal.''

She prepared the seal, with a weaving of these words: ''All feeling, whether it be joy or pain, must come from Allah.'' When it was completed, she sent it to the wazir, who departed with a multitude of thanks.

The king read the inscription upon the seal and asked his messenger who had drawn it out. ''A young girl called Yasmin of the Arabs,'' answered the wazir; and immediately the king rose to his feet, saying: ''Lead me to her father's house that I may marry her.''

The two set out hand in hand and, when they found the sheikh of the Arabs, thus addressed him: ''O honourable, we seek alliance with your line.'' ''You are welcome!'' he answered, ''But through whom do you seek it?'' ''Through your daughter, Yasmin of the Arabs,'' answered the wazir, ''This is our master, the king, and he wishes to marry her.'' ''That is well!'' said the sheikh, ''But, though we are your slaves, my daughter must be set in the scales and balanced with gold; for she is very dear to her father's heart.'' ''It is permitted,'' replied the wazir.

As soon as gold had been fetched from the palace, Yasmin sat in one of the trays of the balance and dinars were poured into the other, until the weights were equal. Then a marriage contract was drawn out; the king gave a great feast to the Arab village, and that night, lying at her father's house, rejoiced in the virginity of Yasmin. In the morning he departed with her and installed her in his palace.

But, when she had stayed in the palace for a few weeks, Yasmin of the Arabs began to pine and dwindle; so the king called the doctor and said to him: "Go up quickly and examine Yasmin of the Arabs, for I cannot tell why she pines and dwindles." The doctor went up to the queen's apartment and soon came down to the king. "She is not used to cities," he said, "She is a daughter of the fields, and here her breast is straitened for lack of air." "What is to be done?" asked the king, and the hakim replied after consideration: "Build her a palace by the sea and she will soon become more beautiful even than before." The king gave immediate orders for his masons to build a palace by the sea, and, when their work was finished, caused the languishing Yasmin to be carried thither.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-forty-fourth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

BUT, AFTER YASMIN of the Arabs had dwelt some time in that palace, she became plump again and lost her languor. One day, as she leaned out of her window and regarded the sea, a fisherman came to the shore below her and cast his net. When he drew it up filled with shards and shells, Yasmin called down to him: "Cast this time in my name and I will give you a golden dinar for your catch!" So the fisherman cast in Yasmin's name and drew a copper flask to land. The queen muffled herself in her bed sheet, in place of a veil, and ran down to the fisherman, crying: "Here is a dinar, give me the flask!" But the fisherman answered: "By Allah, I will only let you have it for a kiss upon your cheek!"

As they spoke together, the king came upon them and, after passing his sword through the fisherman's heart, threw the body into the sea. Then he turned to Yasmin of the Arabs, saying: "Go where you will, for I shall not look upon you again!"

Yasmin went from that place and walked, fasting and without water, for two days, until she came to a certain city. From morning till noon she sat at the door of a shop in the market, and at last the owner spoke to her, saying: "Lady, though you are welcome to sit before my shop from morning till noon, I would fain know your reason for doing so." "I am a stranger," she answered, "I know no one in this city, and I have neither eaten nor drunken for two days." At once the merchant called his negro slave. "Lead this lady to my house," he said, "and tell them to give her food and drink." So the negro led Yasmin to the house, and said to the merchant's wife: "My master bids you give food and drink to this honourable stranger." The woman looked at Yasmin and became jealous of her beauty; therefore she bade the slave conduct her guest to the hen-house, which was upon the terrace; and the negro did so.

Yasmin remained in the hen-house until evening, then, since no refreshment had been brought to her, she remembered the copper flask. "Perhaps there is a little water in it," she said, as she turned the stopper with her fingers. Immediately a basin and ewer came up out of the flask, and, when Yasmin had used them for washing her hands, they were followed by a tray of excellent meats and wines, so that she was able to eat and drink and sit content. When she turned the stopper again, ten young white slaves came up out of the flask, with crotals in their hands, and began to dance upon the floor of the hen-house. With the last movement of their dancing each threw ten purses filled with gold into Yasmin's lap and returned into the flask.

For three days the girl remained unnoticed in the hen-house, eating and drinking of the best and beguiling her weariness with the skill of the white dancers. And, as she received ten times ten purses of dinars for each dance, the hen-house was soon filled to the top with gold.

On the fourth morning the negro slave, coming on to the terrace to satisfy a need, saw Yasmin in the hen-house and was astonished, for his mistress had told him that the guest had departed long ago. "Has your master sent you with food and drink for me," asked Yasmin, "or does he wish my state to be more wretched than it was before his invitation?" "O lady," answered the slave, "my master thought that they had immediately given you bread and that you had departed." He ran to the shop and sought out the merchant, saying: "That unfortunate woman, whom you bade me lead home, has been three days in the hen-house on the terrace without food or drink." The kind-hearted merchant flew into a rage; he shut up his shop and ran home to his wife. "Vile wretch," he cried, "you have kept our guest without food or drink!" and, so saying, he beat the woman with a stick until his arm could rise no more. Then he took bread, with other necessaries, and climbing up to the terrace, said to Yasmin: "Eat heartily, poor soul, and do not blame me too greatly for my forgetfulness." "Allah increase you," she replied, "for I am as grateful as if your charities had reached their goal! If you would set a crown upon your kindness, do me this final favour: build me a palace outside the city which shall be twice as beautiful as the king's." "Certainly, certainly," answered the merchant, and Yasmin continued: "Here is gold. Take as much as you need, and pay the masons four dirhams instead of one for each day's work, if that will hasten them."

The merchant took the money with a bow. He called together the architects and masons of that city, and these had soon built a palace twice as beautiful as the king's. When he had returned to the hen-house and informed his mistress that the work was finished, she gave him more gold and begged him to furnish the palace all in satin, and to collect negro servants who should know no word of Arabic. The merchant furnished the palace gloriously, collected Barbarin servants who knew no Arabic, and then returned to the terrace, saying: "O my mistress, your home is now complete. Have the goodness to come and take possession." But, before leaving her strange abiding place, Yasmin turned to the merchant with a smile, saying: "The hen-house is full to the ceiling with new gold. Take it as a gift from me, for you have been very kind." So much for the merchant.

Yasmin entered her palace and dressed herself in a royal robe of great magnificence, so that when she sat upon the throne there, she had the appearance of a handsome king. So much for her.

A few days after he had killed the fisherman and sent his queen away, the sultan became calm; and for the whole of one night his thoughts were busy with Yasmin. In the morning he called his wazir to him, saying: "Let us disguise ourselves and set forth in quest of my lost lady." So the two disguised themselves and wandered far, asking and listening, until they came to the city where Yasmin dwelt and beheld her palace rising to the sky. "This building is new," said the king, "I have never seen it before in my journeys. To whom can it belong?" "I do not know," answered the wazir, "but perhaps it was built by some invading king, who has conquered the city without our knowledge." "By Allah, you may be right!" exclaimed the sultan, "We can find out for certain by having proclamation made through the city that no light must be shown from any dwelling tonight. That will determine whether the folk in the palace are obedient subjects or invading kings."

The proclamation was made, and, when night came, the sultan and his wazir walked through the city and beheld no light in any building save the new palace, which was splendidly illuminated and filled with singing and the sound of lutes. "I was right!" exclaimed the wazir; yet the sultan would not be satisfied until he had questioned the doorkeeper. But the negro who stood upon the marble steps had come from Barbary and knew no Arabic; therefore he answered each inquiry with: "Shanu!" which signifies in the Barbarin tongue: "I do not know." So the king and his wazir were forced to depart unsatisfied, and could not sleep that night because of fear.

On the next day the sultan had the same proclamation made, but, when he and his wazir went their round that night, the palace was more than twice as brightly lighted as before. "I was right!" exclaimed the wazir. "You were right," answered the sultan, "but what shall we do now?" "Sleep," replied the wazir, "for the evil of tomorrow will come tomorrow."

And the next day the wazir said: "Let us walk up and down in front of the palace like all the rest; then, if Allah favours me, I shall creep into the building and find out something of this king."

The sultan readily agreed to the plan. While he held the doorkeeper in uncomprehended conversation, the wazir crept unseen into the palace and made his stealthy way to the throne hall. He saluted Yasmin, taking her to be a young king, and she cordially bade him be seated. She knew him instantly, in spite of his disguise, and was not ignorant of her husband's presence in the city; but she turned the stopper of her copper flask and, after giving refreshment to the wazir, bade him keep the consequent gold. "It is a gift, for I can see that you are poor," she said; and the wazir kissed her hand, as he answered: "May Allah grant you victory over all your foes, O king of time, and indefinitely prolong your days for our delight!" Then he took leave, and descended to rejoin the king.

"What did you learn?" asked the king, and the wazir answered: "By Allah, I was right when I told you that the city had been invaded! He gave me a hundred purses of gold to ease my poverty! Can you doubt that I was right?" "Perhaps there is something in what you say," replied the sultan, "But I think that I also will elude the vigilance of these Barbarins and see for myself."

Yasmin of the Arabs pretended not to know her lord. She rose in his honour and bade him be seated. Such submissive conduct reassured the sultan, and he said to himself: "This is a subject and not a king." When he had eaten and drunken, he steeled himself to ask what might be the quality of those who dwelt in the palace, and Yasmin smiled, as she answered: "We are rich, very rich." As she spoke she turned the stopper of the flask, and ten white dazzling slaves came forth to dance to the crotals. When they had finished, each cast, as ever, ten purses into Yasmin's lap.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-forty-fifth Night
Had Come

She said:

The king marvelled exceedingly at the flask, and cried: "Will you tell me where you bought that prodigy, my brother?" "I did not buy it," she answered, "I begged it from the owner in exchange for anything he wished. He would not sell it, but agreed to give it to me if I would once do with him as he wished. I consented, and thus obtained the flask."

Now Yasmin only told this lie because she had an idea.

"You took an excellent and easy way!" exclaimed the sultan, "If you would care to give me the flask, I will readily consent to such conditions not only once but twice." "Twice is not enough," answered Yasmin. "Then I will agree to four for that most marvellous flask," answered the sultan eagerly. So Yasmin bade him come into another room, and he rose and followed her.

But, as soon as the queen saw the king place himself in the ignominious attitude which was necessary for the completion of their bargain, she laughed so heartily that she fell to the floor with mirth. "The name of Allah be upon you and about you, O king of time!" she cried, "You are a sultan, and yet you would be disgraced for a flask! How can you reconcile that with your rash slaying of the fisherman who only asked me a kiss upon the cheek for it?"

At first the sultan was speechless with surprise. Then he began to laugh, saying: "Is it you? Is all this coil from you?" He gave her the kiss of reconciliation, and the two lived henceforth together in prosperous harmony.

When Nur Al-Din had made an end of this tale, the delighted Bibars praised him for it, in Allah's name. Then a sixth policeman, whose name was Gamal Al-Din, advanced to the foot of the throne, saying: "O king of time, by your leave I will tell you a most pleasing story." "You have our leave," said Bibars, and Gamal Al-Din began:

THE SIXTH CAPTAIN'S TALE

There was once a sultan who had a very beautiful daughter, well-loved and petted and most elegant. Therefore she was called Dalal.

One day, as she sat scratching her head, she caught a little louse; she looked at it for a long time and then carried it in her fingers to the provision cellar, which was filled with large jars of oil, butter, and honey. Opening the big oil jar, she set the louse down gently upon the surface of its contents and then, replacing the lid, went her way.

Days and years passed by, and Princess Dalal reached her fifteenth year, with no memory at all of the louse and its imprisonment.

But one day the louse broke the jar by its great bulk and came forth with the appearance of a Nile buffalo. The cellar guard fled in terror, calling loudly to the servants for help; and at length the louse was caught by the horns and led into the presence of the king.

"What is this?" cried the astonished monarch; and Dalal, who was standing near, exclaimed: "Yeh, yeh! It is my louse! When I was little, I found it in my head and fastened it in an oil jar. Now it has become so big that it has broken its prison."

"My daughter," answered the king, "it is high time that you were married. The louse has broken his jar, and tomorrow we shall have you breaking your wall and going to men. Allah protect us from such breakages!"

Then he turned to his wazir, and said: "Cut the thing's throat, flay it, and hang its skin to the palace gate. Then go forth, with my executioner and chief scribe, for I intend to marry my daughter to the man who can recognise the skin for what it is. Those suitors who fail shall have their heads cut off and their hides hung beside the louse."

The wazir cut the throat of the louse in that same hour, and after flaying it, hung its skin to the palace gate. Then he sent a herald about the city to proclaim: "He who can recognise the skin upon the palace door for what it is shall marry the Lady Dalal, daughter of our king; but he who fails to recognise it shall have his head cut off." Many of the young men of the city defiled before the dubious hide; some said that it had belonged to a buffalo, some that it had been taken from a wild goat; and thus forty lost their heads and had their skins hung up beside the louse.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-forty-sixth Night
Had Come

She said:

Then there passed a youth who was as fair as the star Canopus shining upon the sea. When he was informed that the suitor who recognised the skin for what it was might marry the king's daughter, he went up to the wazir, the executioner, and the chief scribe, saying: "It is the skin of a louse which has grown great in oil."

"True, true, O excellent young man!" they cried, and led him into the presence of the king. When he stood before the throne, he said: "It is the skin of a louse grown great in oil." And the king exclaimed: "True, true! Let the marriage contract be written out at once."

The wedding took place on the same day, and that night the star-like youth rejoiced in the virgin Dalal, who learnt all the beauty of love in his arms, for he was like the star Canopus shining upon the sea.

They stayed together for forty days in the palace, and then the youth sought out his father-in-law, saying: "I am a king's son, and would take my princess to abide in my father's kingdom." After trying to dissuade him from this course, the sultan gave his consent, and said: "Tomorrow, my son, we will collect gifts for you, together with slaves and eunuchs."

But the youth replied: "We have a sufficiency of such things, and I desire naught save Dalal." "Take her, then, and depart in Allah's name!" said the king, "But take her mother also, that she may learn the way to your father's palace and afterwards visit our daughter from time to time." But the youth replied: "Why should we uselessly fatigue your queen, who is far on in years? I undertake to send my wife back once a month, to rejoice your eyes and tell you of her doings." "So be it," answered the king; and, forthwith, the youth departed with Dalal for his own country.

Now this handsome youth was none other than a ghoul of the most dangerous kind. He installed Dalal in his house on the top of a lonely mountain and then went forth to beat the country, to lie in wait about the roads, to make pregnant women miscarry, to frighten old dames, to terrify children, to howl in the wind, to whine at doors, to bark in the night, to haunt ruins, to cast spells, to grin in the shadows, to visit tombs, to sniff at the dead, to commit a thousand assaults and provoke a thousand calamities. Worn out at length, however, he became a youth again and carried back a man's head to his wife, saying: "O Dalal, cook this in the oven and carve it so that we may eat." But Dalal answered: "But it is a man's head and I eat nothing except mutton." So the ghoul brought her a sheep, and she was fed.

They lived together alone in this solitude, and Dalal was defenceless against her horrible husband, who would come back to her with traces of murder and rape upon his body.

After eight days of such existence, the ghoul went out and changed himself into the appearance of his mother-in-law. He dressed in woman's clothes, knocked at his own door, and, when Dalal asked from her window who was there, answered in the old woman's voice. Dalal ran down and opened the door, and behold! in those eight days she had become pale and thin and languishing. The false mother kissed her daughter, and said: "My dear, I have come to see you in spite of all opposition, for we have learnt that your husband is a ghoul and makes you eat human flesh. Oh, how is it with you, my daughter? Alas, I fear that a time may come when he will be tempted to eat you also; so flee with me now, my dear!" But the loyal Dalal answered: "Be quiet, mother! There is no ghoul here, no trace or smell of a ghoul. Oh, my calamity, you must not say such things! My husband is a king's son and as beautiful as the star Canopus shining upon the sea. He gives me a fat sheep every day."

The ghoul departed, rejoicing at his wife's discretion, and, when he returned in his male form carrying a sheep, Dalal said to him: "My mother came to visit me; it was not my fault. She bade me salute you." "I am sorry that I did not hurry home," answered the ghoul, "for I should have rejoiced to greet so solicitous a lady. Would you like to see your aunt, your mother's sister?" "Oh, yes," she cried; and he promised to send the old woman to her on the morrow.

Next morning, at dawn, he took on the appearance of Dalal's aunt and, when he came into her presence, kissed her upon the cheeks, weeping and sobbing as if his heart would break. Dalal asked what was the matter, and the false aunt replied: "Aie! aie! aie! Alas, alas! It is not for myself but for you that I lament! We have found out that you have married a ghoul!" But Dalal cried: "Be quiet! I will not listen to such wicked words! My husband is a king's son, even as I am a king's daughter; his treasures are greater than my father's treasures, and he is as handsome as the little star Canopus shining upon the sea."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-forty-seventh Night
Had Come

She said:

Then Dalal fed the false aunt on sheep's head, to show her that mutton and not man was eaten there; and the ghoul departed in high good humour.

When he returned with a sheep for Dalal and a freshly-severed head for himself, his wife said to him: "My aunt has been to visit me, and sends you greeting." "Praise be to Allah!" he answered, "I take it kindly that your family do not forget you. Would you like to see your other aunt, your father's sister?" "Oh, yes," she cried; and he continued: "I will send her tomorrow and, after that, you shall see no more of your relations, for I fear their blabbing tongues."

Next morning he presented himself before Dalal in the form of her other aunt, who wept long upon her neck. "Alas, what desolation upon our heads and upon you, O daughter of my brother!" she sobbed at length. "We have found out that you have married a ghoul. Tell me the truth, my daughter, I conjure you by the virtues of our lord Muhamad (upon whom be prayer and peace!)." Then Dalal, who could hold her terrible secret no longer, answered in a low voice: "Be quiet, good aunt, be quiet, or he will destroy us both. He brings me human heads, think of it! When

I refuse, he eats them all himself. I fear that soon he will make a meal of me."

As she said these last words, the ghoul took on his own terrible shape and ground his teeth at her in fury. As she fell back, trembling for yellow terror, he spoke gently to her, saying: "So you have already told my secret, Dalal?" She threw herself at his feet, crying: "Pardon me this time, spare me this time!" "And did you spare my character before your aunt?" he asked, "Where shall I begin to eat you?" "If it is in my destiny, then you must eat me," she answered, "but today I am dirty and would not taste at all pleasant. It will be well for you to take me to the hammam where I can wash myself for your table. After the bath, I shall be white and sweet, and my flesh a delicious savour in your mouth. Also I give you leave to start with any part you please."

At once the ghoul collected suitable linens and a large gold basin. Then he changed one of his evil friends into a white ass and, after transforming himself into a donkey-boy, led the ass, with Dalal upon its back, towards the hammam of the nearest village.

When he came to the hammam, carrying the gold basin upon his head, he said to the female guard: "Here are three dinars for you. Give this king's daughter a good bath and return her safely to me." Then he sat down outside the door to wait.

Dalal entered the vestibule and seated herself sadly upon a marble bench, with the basin and the rare linens beside her. The young girls went into the bath and bathed, and were rubbed, and came out jesting happily with each other; but Dalal wept silently in her corner. At length a troop of maidens came to her, saying: "Why do you weep? Rather undress and take a bath with us." But though she thanked them, she answered: "Is there any bath which can wash away grief, or cure the hopeless sorrows of the world? There will be time enough to bathe, my sisters."

As the girls turned away, an old woman entered the hammam, bearing a bowl upon her head, filled with fried earth-nuts and roast lupines. Some of the young women bought her goods for a penny, a halfpenny, or two pence; and Dalal, wishing to forget her trouble, called to her, saying: "Give me a pennyworth of lupines, good aunt." The old woman sat down by the bench and filled a horn measure with lupines; but, instead of giving her a penny, Dalal handed her a necklace of pearls, saying: "Take this for your children." Then, as the seller confounded herself in thanks and kissings of the hand, she said again: "Will you give me your bowl and your ragged clothes in exchange for this gold basin, these linens, and all my jewelry and garments?" "Why mock a poor old woman, my daughter?" asked the incredulous seller; but, when Dalal had reassured her, she hastily stripped off her rags. Dalal dressed herself hastily in them, balanced the bowl of lupines upon her head, muffled herself in the old woman's filthy blue veil, blackened her hands with the mud of the vestibule pavement, and went out by the door near which the ghoul was sitting. Her whole body was one stupendous fright, but she schooled herself to cry: "Lupines, roast lupines, pleasant distractions! Earth-nuts, delightful earth-nuts, piping hot!"

Though the ghoul had not recognised her, he smelt her smell after she had gone by, and said to himself: "How can this old lupine seller have my Dalal's smell? As Allah lives, I must look into this!" Then he cried aloud: "Hi, lupine seller! Earth-nuts, earth-nuts, come here!" But, as the woman did not turn her head, he said again to himself: "It will be safer to make inquiry at the hammam." He approached the guard, and asked: "Why is this woman, whom I gave into your charge, so long?" "She will come out later with the other women," answered the guard, "They do not leave till nightfall; for they have much to do, what with depilating themselves and tinting their fingers in henna, what with scenting themselves and tressing their hair."

The ghoul was reassured and sat down again; but, when all the women had left and the guard came out to shut the door, he cried: "What are you doing? Do you mean to shut my lady in?" "There is no one left in the hammam," she answered, "except the old lupine seller whom we always allow to sleep there, because she has no home." The ghoul took the woman by the neck and shook her and made as if to strangle her, shouting in her face: "O bawd, you are responsible for her! I gave her into your hands!" "I am here to look after slippers," she answered, "I am no keeper of foul men's wives." Then, as he increased the grip of his fingers about her neck, she cried: "Help, help, good Mussulmans!" The men of that village ran up from all sides; but the ogre took no heed of them and began to beat the slipper guard. "You shall give her back to me," he bawled, "even if she be in the seventh planet, O property of ancient whores!" So much for him.

Dalal walked on across the country in the direction of her father's kingdom, until she came to a running stream, where she bathed her hands and face and feet. Then she made her way to a king's palace which stood near and sat down by the wall.

A negress slave, who came down for some purpose, saw her and returned to her mistress, saying: "Dear mistress, were it not for the terror which I have of you, I would make bold to say that there is a woman below more beautiful even than yourself.'' ''Bring her up here,'' answered her mistress. So the negress went down, and said to Dalal: ''My mistress bids you come and have speech with her.'' ''Was my mother a black slave,'' replied Dalal, ''was my father a black slave, that I should walk with slaves?'' The woman carried this answer to her mistress, who sent down a white slave with the same message. But when she had spoken, Dalal answered: ''Was my mother a white slave, was my father a white slave, that I should walk with slaves?'' When she heard of this, the queen of that palace called her son to her and bade him go down to Dalal.

The young prince, who was as handsome as the little star Canopus shining upon the sea, went down to the girl, and said to her: ''Dear lady, have the great goodness to visit the queen, my mother, in her harem.'' And this time Dalal answered: ''I will go up with you; for you are a king's son, even as I am a king's daughter.'' So saying, she began to walk up the stairs before him.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-forty-eighth Night
Had Come

She said:

When the prince saw Dalal mounting the stairs in her beauty, a great love for her descended upon his heart. Also Dalal opened her soul to the beauty of his regal youth. Also the queen, the wife of the king of that palace, said to herself when she looked upon the girl: "The slave was right. She is more beautiful than I."

After greeting and salutation, the prince said to his mother: "I would marry this lady; the royalty of her line shines clearly forth from her." "That is your business, my son," answered his mother, "You are old enough to know what you are doing."

The young prince called the kadi to write out a marriage contract, and the wedding was celebrated on that day. At night he went up into the bridal chamber.

But what, in the meanwhile, had happened to the ghoul?

You shall hear.

On the wedding day a man came to the palace, leading a fat white ram, and gave it to the king, saying: "My lord, I am one of your farmers and have brought this as a gift for your son's marriage. We fattened him ourselves. But I must beg you to fasten him at the door of the harem, for he was born and raised among women and, if you leave him below, he will bleat all night and trouble the sleep of your palace." The king accepted this present and sent the farmer on his way with a robe of honour; then he handed over the ram to the agha of the harem, saying: "Tie him at the door of the harem, for he is only quiet and happy when he is among women."

When the prince had entered the marriage chamber that night and accomplished that which there was to accomplish, he fell into a deep sleep at Dalal's side. Then the white ram broke his cord and entered the room. He lifted Dalal and carried her out into the courtyard, saying gently: "Have you left me much of my honour, Dalal?" "Do not eat me," she begged; but he replied: "This time there is no help for it." Then she prayed him to wait, before eating her, until she had satisfied a need in the privy; so the ghoul carried her to the courtyard privy and waited outside until she should have finished.

As soon as she was alone in the privy, Dalal lifted her two hands on high, praying: "O Our Lady Zaynab, O daughter of the blessed prophet, come to my aid!" The saint heard her and sent down one of her following, a daughter of the Jinn, who came through the wall and asked: "What is your desire, O Dalal?" "The ghoul is outside," answered the princess, "and he will eat me when I go forth." Then said the Jinnia: "If I save you from him, will you let me kiss you?" and, when Dalal consented to this condition, she passed through the wall into the courtyard, threw herself upon the ghoul, and kicked him so violently in the belly that he fell dead.

Then the Jinnia went back to the privy and led out Dalal to see the body of the fat white ram. The two dragged him away from the courtyard and threw him into the ditch. So much, definitively, for him.

"Now I wish to ask a service of you," said the Jinnia, as she kissed Dalal upon the cheek. "I am your humble servant, dear," answered the princess. "Come with me, then," urged the Jinnia, "for one little hour, to the Emerald Sea. My son is ill, and the doctor has said that the only cure for him is a porringer of water of the Emerald Sea. But none save a human can fill a porringer at the Emerald Sea, my darling, and I ask your help in return for the trifling service which I have done you." "I will go willingly," answered Dalal, "as long as I can return before my husband wakes."

The Jinnia took up Dalal upon her shoulders, and carried her to the shores of the Emerald Sea, where she gave her a gold porringer; and Dalal filled the porringer with that water of marvel, but, as she lifted the vessel, a little wave, which had been thus commanded, lapped over her hand so that it became as green as clover. Then the Jinnia took up Dalal again and soon laid her upon her bride bed at the prince's side. So much for the servant of the Lady Zaynab (upon whom be prayer and peace!).

Now there is a weigher of the Emerald Sea, who comes to measure and weigh it every morning, for he is responsible and wishes to know if any of the water has been stolen. Next day, when he had weighed and measured the sea, he found that there was a porringer missing. "Who can have been the thief?" he cried, "I will voyage the world until I catch him. If I can find a man, or more likely a woman, with a green hand, our sultan will know the proper punishment."

He provided himself with a tray of green glass rings and bracelets, and wandered over the world, crying under the windows of kings' palaces: "Green glass bracelets, O princesses! O young ladies, emerald rings!"

After ten years of fruitless searching in all lands, he came to the palace where Dalal dwelt in her content. As soon as he began to cry beneath the windows: "Green glass bracelets, O princesses! O young ladies, emerald rings!" the princess came down to him and stretched forth her left hand, saying: "Try some of your fairest bracelets." But the weigher of the Emerald Sea recoiled, and cried: "Lady, are you not ashamed to give me your left hand? I only try bracelets on the right." "My right hand hurts," answered

Dalal; but the weigher insisted, saying: "I will only look and take the measure with my eye. I will not touch." So the princess showed her right hand, and lo! it was as green as clover.

At once the weigher of the Emerald Sea lifted her in his arms and carried her, with the speed of light, into the presence of his king, saying: "O sultan of the sea, she has stolen a porringer of your water. My lord knows the penalty." The sultan of the Emerald Sea prepared to look angrily upon Dalal, but, as soon as his eyes beheld her, he was troubled by her beauty, and said: "O young girl, I wish to marry you." "That is a pity," she answered, "for I am already lawfully married to a youth as fair as the little star of Canopus shining upon the sea." "Have you a sister who at all resembles you?" asked the king, "or a daughter, or even a son?" "I have a daughter, ten years old," answered Dalal, "Today she has become ripe for marriage, and she is as beautiful as her father." "That is excellent," said the sultan of the Emerald Sea.

He took Dalal's hand in his, and the weigher carried them both to the spot from which he had ravished the princess.

Dalal led the king into the presence of her husband and, when the demand for their daughter's hand had been made in due form, the prince requested the stranger to name a dowry. Then said the lord of the miraculous water: "I will give forty camels loaded with emeralds and hyacinths."

Thus it came about that the sultan of the Emerald Sea married the daughter of Dalal and the starry prince. It is not recorded whether the four lived together in perfect harmony. But glory be to Allah in any case!

Before Captain Gamal Al-Din had time to regain his place, Sultan Bibars cried: "As Allah lives, O Gamal, that is the most beautiful story which I have ever heard!" "It has become so, since it has pleased our master," said Gamal, as he took his seat. Then a seventh policeman, whose name was Fakr Al-Din, embraced the earth before the throne, saying: "O our emir and our king, I will tell you a personal anecdote, which has the single merit of being short." And he told:

THE SEVENTH CAPTAIN'S TALE

One night an Arab thief broke into a farmer's house in my district, to steal a sack of corn; but the farm folk heard the noise he made and called me loudly, with cries of: "Thief! Thief!" Yet the man managed to hide himself so cleverly that we could not find him, and I was already walking away from the door, when I noticed a high heap of corn standing in the yard, with a copper measure on top of it. As I passed this heap, I heard an awe-inspiring fart proceed from the middle of it and saw the copper measure rise full five feet into the air. At once I searched among the corn and brought the thief to light, kneeling in the middle of it, bottom upwards. When I had bound him, I questioned him concerning the strange outburst which had betrayed his presence to me. "It was intentional, my lord," he answered. "Intentional?" I cried, "Whoever heard of a man farting to his own disadvantage?" "It was for your advantage," he retorted. "Whoever heard of a fart being to anyone's advantage?" I cried again. "I did it to make things easy for you," declared the thief, "and I trust that you will be fair-minded enough to make things easy for me." What could I do but let him go?

Such is my story.

"By Allah, you acted rightly!" cried Sultan Bibars, when he had heard this tale. Then, as Fakr Al-Din returned to his place, an eighth policeman, named Nizam Al-Din, came forward, saying: "O king of time, I will tell you a tale which has nothing in common with those which you have heard already." "Did you see the thing, or only hear of it?" asked Bibars. "I heard of it, my lord," answered Nizam.

And he said:

THE TALE OF THE EIGHTH CAPTAIN

There was once a strolling clarinet player, whose wife became pregnant by his works and, with Allah's help, was delivered of a son. As the man had no money at all to pay the midwife or to buy food for the mother, he left the house, intending to beg two copper pieces from the charitably disposed on Allah's way, that he might give one to the midwife on account and the other to the poultry merchant in earnest for a fowl.

As he walked through a field, he saw a hen sitting on a hillock; creeping up behind her, he lifted her and found a freshly laid egg on the grass beneath. Slipping the egg into his pocket and tucking the bird beneath his arm, he retraced his footsteps, saying to himself: "There is a blessing upon the day! My wife can have the fowl, and I will sell the egg to pay the midwife something on account."

As he passed through the jeweller's market on his way to the egg market, he met a Jew of his acquaintance, who asked him what he carried. "A hen and an egg," he answered, and at once the Jew wished to know if he would sell the egg. "Yes," said he. "How much?" asked the Jew. "Speak first," said he. "It is not worth more than ten gold dinars," said the Jew. Thinking that the infidel mocked him, the poor man cried: "You know that that is no price for an egg!" The Jew thought that he was demanding more, so he raised his offer to fifteen dinars. "Allah open another door!" cried the clarinet player, and the Jew, with bitter hatred in his heart, exclaimed: "Twenty dinars of new gold; take them or leave them!" The delighted clarinet player saw that the offer was serious, so he handed over the egg, received the money, and began hastily to move away. But the Jew ran after him and asked: "Have you many eggs like that at home?" "I can bring you one tomorrow, when the hen has laid again," answered the man, "and I will only charge you the same price, though to anyone else it would be thirty dinars." Then said the Jew: "Point out your house to me and I will come every morning to buy an egg for twenty dinars." The clarinet player pointed out his house, and then bought another and ordinary hen, which he cooked for the child's mother, at the same time paying the midwife handsomely for her trouble.

Next morning he leaned over the bed, saying: "O daughter of my uncle, take great care not to kill the black hen which lives in the kitchen, for she is the blessing of our house and lays eggs worth twenty dinars each. The Jew has promised to buy all that we can give him at that price."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-forty-ninth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

THE JEW CAME every morning and bought the black hen's egg for twenty dinars, so that in a short time the clarinet player's circumstance became most comfortable, and he was able to open a fair shop in the market.

When the son, who had been born on the day of the hen's discovery, was old enough to go to school, his father had a handsome seminary built at his own expense and called together the children of the poor, that they might learn to read and write with his own child. He hired an excellent master for them, one who knew the Koran by heart and could even recite it backwards.

Then he resolved to go on pilgrimage and, after cautioning his wife lest the Jew should try to cozen her of the hen, left with a caravan for Mecca.

Soon after his departure, the Jew said to the woman: "I have a trunk full of gold to give you if you will let me have the hen in exchange." "How can I do such a thing?" she asked, "My husband bade me only give you the eggs." "If he is angry I will take the responsibility," pleaded the Jew, "My shop is known in the market; I will not run away from him." With that he opened the trunk and showed the glorious gold within. As soon as she saw it, the woman handed over the black hen, and the Jew gave her the trunk with its contents, saying: "Now clean the bird and cook it. I will come back in a few hours and, if a single part of it be missing, I will slit up the belly of the eater rather than lose it." After that he went his way.

At noon the lad returned from school and saw his mother take the hen from the pot, set it in a porcelain dish, and cover it with muslin. His schoolboy's appetite clamored for a portion of the enticing bird; but, when he asked to be allowed to take a piece, his mother told him that the dish was not for them.

Yet, when she went away to satisfy a need, her son lifted the muslin and, with a single snap of his teeth, removed the hen's hot rump and swallowed it whole. One of the slaves saw him in the act, and cried: "O my master, what misfortune, what dire calamity! If you do not flee from the house, the Jew will slit your belly to recover the rump!" "You are right," replied the boy, "it would be better to depart than to lose that pleasant rump." So he mounted his mule and rode away.

When the Jew returned for his property and asked after the missing rump, the woman told him that her son had bitten it off, in her absence, and swallowed it. Then cried the Jew: "Woe, woe upon you! It was for the rump that I paid you all that gold. Where is your son?" "He has fled in terror," she replied.

The Jew departed hastily and journeyed through towns and villages, until he came upon the boy sleeping in a field. He crept up softly to kill him, but the lad, who was sleeping with one eye open, jumped up and made as if to flee. "Come here, my child," said the Jew, "Who asked you to eat that rump? I gave your mother a chest full of gold for the thing, and the bargain can only be completed by your death." "Be gone, O Jew!" answered the boy, without a sign of fear, "Are you not ashamed to journey so far for a hen's rump? Are you not ashamed to wish to open my belly for so small a thing?" Then, as the Jew drew a knife from his belt, the courageous child seized him with one hand and, lifting him high, dashed him against the earth (curse him!) so that his bones were broken and he died.

The boy was soon to feel further effects of the hen's rump; for, in attempting to return to his mother's house he lost his way and came to a king's palace, the door of which was decorated with forty severed heads save one. When he asked concerning these, the people said to him: "The king has a daughter who is a very strong wrestler; she has consented to marry the man who can conquer her in this sport, but those whom she defeats are always beheaded." Without hesitation the youth sought the presence of the king, saying: "I wish to measure my strength against your daughter's strength." "My boy," answered the king, "if you take my advice you will depart. Many strong grown men have come here and lost to my daughter. I would not wish to have to cut you off before your prime." "If I am beaten," answered the boy, "I am quite willing to have my head severed and hung upon the gate." "Then write an undertaking to that effect and seal it with your seal," said the king.

As soon as the undertaking had been signed and sealed, a carpet was spread in the inner court, and the boy and girl stood facing each other upon it, with arms about each other's waists and armpit locked in armpit. Their wrestling was a marvel to be seen; sometimes the boy lifted the princess and threw her to the ground, but she would ever slip from under him like a serpent and throw him in her turn. For two hours they strove together, and neither could press the adverse shoulder to the carpet. Therefore the king became angry, seeing that his daughter did not distinguish herself, and cried: "Enough for today! Tomorrow you shall wrestle again."

Then he retired to his apartment and called his doctors to him, saying: "Tonight, while that boy is asleep, you must give him narcotic banj and carefully examine his body. If you can find the amulet which makes him powerful against one who has thrown thirty-nine of the strongest men, I will reward you; but, if you fail to discover anything, I will cast you from my palace and my city."

So, when night came and the boy slept, the physicians made him breathe narcotic banj and sounded his body as a man might sound a jar. They came at length upon the hen's rump, bedded among the entrails, and, recognising it, sent for their scissors and their instruments. They made an incision and withdrew the rump; then they sewed up the wound, sprinkled it with powerful vinegar, and left all as it had been.

In the morning the boy woke from his drugged sleep and found his force abated, for his remarkable strength had been due entirely to the hen's rump, which had the property of making the eater invincible. Knowing full well that he could not hold his own in his present state, he fled from the palace and the city, and kept on running till he came upon three men who were quarreling violently among themselves. "Why do you quarrel?" he asked, and they replied: "For a thing." "What sort of thing?" he asked and they replied: "For this carpet. It is a magic carpet; if any beat it with this stick and bid it remove to such-and-such a place, were it even to the top of Kaf, it will remove." "Instead of wringing each other's necks for the carpet," said the boy, "let me be your arbiter." "We consent," they answered, and he said again: "Spread out the carpet on the ground that I may see its length and breadth." When this had been done, he stood in the middle of the carpet and told the three claimants that he would cast a stone for them to race for and bring back; but, when he had done so and they were far off, running their hardest, he beat the carpet with the stick, crying: "Take me straight to the interior of the palace which I left this morning." In the twinkling of an eye he found himself in the courtyard where he had wrestled on the previous day.

"The champion! The champion!" he cried, "Who will meet him?" and presently the young girl came down, in the presence of the whole court, and stood before him on the carpet. Without giving her time to engage him, he struck down with his stick, saying: "Fly with us to the top of Kaf!" The carpet rose into the air and, leaving the sea of upturned stupid faces below, bore the youth and maiden to the top of Kaf.

"Who wins now?" cried the boy, "She who had the hen's rump filched from my belly, or he who has filched the princess from her palace?"

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-fiftieth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

"I CLAIM YOUR protection," said the girl meekly, "I ask you to pardon me. If you will take me back to my father's palace, I will proclaim that you have thrown me, and marry you at once." "That is all very well," replied the boy, "but there is a proverb which says:

Beat the bolt while it is soft. I wish to do you know what before I take you back.'' With that he took the seemingly consenting girl and was fumbling for a soft bolt in order to beat it, when she kicked upwards violently, so that he rolled off the carpet. Before he had time to rise, she struck the magic fabric with the stick, and cried: ''Fly back to my father's palace.'' Thus, in the twinkling of an eye, the boy was left alone.

The clarinet player's son stayed lonely on the top of the mountain, so far from the world that even the ants might not have found him, until he began to feel hunger and thirst. Then he scrambled down, gnawing his hand for rage. In a day and a night he reached to the middle height of Kaf, and, on the morning of the second day, came upon two date palms bowed with their abundance of ripe fruit. One of them bore red dates, and the other yellow.

The boy picked a branch of each, and, as he preferred yellow dates, swallowed one of them with great delight. But hardly had it passed his lips when he had an itching of his scalp and, carrying his hand to the place, felt a horn rapidly growing out of his head. This horn wound itself round one of the palms, and the unfortunate youth found himself a prisoner. ''If I am doomed,'' he said to himself, ''I would rather die fed than fasting.'' And he fell upon the red dates. But, no sooner had he eaten one of them, than the horn writhed away from about the palm and, leaving him free, grew small and disappeared.

He ate the red dates until his hunger was satisfied and then, after filling his pockets with fruit of each colour, went on walking so vigorously that, by the end of two months, he had come back to the palace of the wrestling princess.

He strode beneath the windows, crying: ''Dates, early dates, oh, dates! Girls' fingers, oh, dates! Riders' friends, oh, dates!''

When the king's daughter heard this call, she said to her maidens: ''Run quickly and buy me some dates. Be careful to pick out the crisp ones.'' So the maidens went down and bought sixteen, paying a dinar each because of their rarity at that season.

The princess saw that the dates were yellow, the kind that she loved best; so she ate the whole sixteen, one after the other, as quickly as she could carry them to her mouth. ''My heart, but they are excellent!'' she said; but, even as she spoke, she had an itching in sixteen parts of her head and felt sixteen horns growing out of her scalp, from sixteen different spots symmetrically placed. Before she could speak again or move, the horns had branched off, four by four, and solidly pierced the walls of her room.

At the shrill cries of his daughter and her following, the king ran in great haste, and the maidens cried to him: ''Dear master, we saw these sixteen horns come out of our lady's head and instantly pierce the wall!''

The distracted father called together those skilful physicians who had stolen away the hen's rump from the lad's belly, and they tried to saw through the horns; but the things would not be sawn. Then they made use of other means; but nothing would free the princess.

So the king had no choice but to send a herald about the city, to cry: ''He who shall cure the princess of her sixteen horns may marry her, and shall be considered worthy to succeed the king!''

Now, what do you think happened?

The clarinet's son, who had eagerly expected this proclamation, entered the palace, saying: ''I will cure the horns.'' When he was in the presence of the girl he loved, he broke one of the red dates and placed the fragments between her teeth. At once a horn detached itself from the wall and dwindled towards the princess's head, until it vanished utterly.

All the court, with the king at its head, joyfully cried out: "A doctor of doctors!" and the boy repied: "Tomorrow I will cure the second horn." He was kept in the palace with all honour and high entertainment, curing a horn each day, until the last had disappeared.

Finding his daughter free and undisfigured, the grateful king had his city illuminated with coloured fires, and married the princess to her preserver. Then came the night of penetration.

When the boy entered the chamber where his bride waited for him, he said: "And who wins now? She who had the hen's rump filched from my belly and stole my magic carpet; or he who grew full sixteen horns upon your head and made them go again?" "It is you, then?" she asked; and he replied: "Yes, it is I, the son of the clarinet!" Then said the princess: "By Allah, you have beaten me!"

They lay down, and their strength was equal. They became king and queen. They lived together in a perfect happiness.

Such is my story.

When Sultan Bibars had listened to this, he cried: "As Allah lives, I am not sure that this tale is not the fairest I have ever heard!" Then a ninth policeman, whose name was Gelal Al-Din, came forward saying: "O king of time, if Allah wills, my tale shall please you greatly." And he said:

THE NINTH CAPTAIN'S TALE

There was once a woman who could not conceive, despite her most earnest desires. So one day she prayed to Allah, saying: "Give me a daughter, even if she be not proof against the smell of flax!"

In speaking thus of the smell of flax she meant that she would have a daughter, even if the girl were so delicate and sensitive that the anodyne smell of flax would take hold of her throat and kill her.

Soon the woman conceived and easily bore a daughter, as fair as the rising moon, as pale and delicate as moonlight.

When little Sittukhan, for such they called her, grew to be ten years old, the sultan's son passed beneath her window and saw her and loved her, and went back ailing to the palace.

Doctor succeeded doctor fruitlessly beside his bed; but, at last, an old woman, who had been sent by the porter's wife, visited him and said, after close scrutiny: "You are in love, or else you have a friend who loves you." "I am in love," he answered. "Tell me her name," she begged, "for I may be a bond between you." "She is the fair Sittukhan," he replied; and she comforted him, saying: "Refresh your eyes and tranquilize your heart, for I will bring you into her presence."

Then she departed and sought out the girl, who was taking the air before her mother's door. After compliment and greeting, she said: "Allah protect so much beauty, my daughter. Girls like you, and with such lovely fingers, should learn to spin flax; for there is no more delightful sight than a spindle in spindle fingers." Then she went her way.

At once the girl went to her mother, saying:

"Mother, take me to the mistress." "What mistress?" asked her mother. "The flax mistress," answered the girl. "Do not say such a thing!" cried the woman, "Flax is a danger to you; its smell is fatal to your breast, a touch of it will kill you." But her daughter reassured her, saying: "I shall not die," and so wept and insisted that her mother sent her to the flax mistress.

The white girl stayed there for a day, learning to spin; and her fellow pupils marvelled at her beauty and the beauty of her fingers. But, when a morsel of flax entered behind one of her nails, she fell swooning to the floor.

They thought her dead and sent to her father and mother, saying: "Allah prolong your days! Come and take up your daughter, for she is dead."

The man and his wife tore their garments for the loss of their only joy, and went, beaten by the wind of calamity, to bury her. But the old woman met them, and said: "You are rich folk and it would be shame on you to lay so fair a girl in dust." "What shall we do then?" they asked, and she replied: "Build her a pavilion in the midst of the waves of the river and couch her there upon a bed, that you may come to visit her."

So they built a pavilion of marble, on columns rising out of the river, and planted a garden about it with green lawns, and set the girl upon an ivory bed, and came there many times to weep.

What happened next?

The old woman went to the king's son, who still lay sick of love, and said to him: "Come with me to see the maiden. She waits you, couched in a pavilion above the waves of the river."

The prince rose up and bade his father's wazir come for a walk with him. The two went forth together and followed the old woman to the pavilion. Then the prince said: "Wait for me outside the door, for I shall not be long."

He entered the pavilion and began to weep by the ivory bed, recalling verses in the praise of so much beauty. He took the girl's hand to kiss it and, as he passed her slim white fingers through his own, noticed the morsel of flax lodged behind one of her nails. He wondered at this and delicately drew it forth.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-fifty-first Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

AT ONCE THE GIRL came out of her swoon and sat up upon the ivory bed. She smiled at the prince, and whispered: "Where am I?" "You are with me," he answered, as he pressed her all against him. He kissed her and fondled her, and they stayed together for forty days and forty nights. Then the prince took leave of his love, saying: "My wàzir is waiting outside the door. I will take him back to the palace and then return."

He found the wazir and walked with him across the garden towards the gate, until he was met by white roses growing with jasmin. The sight of these moved him, and he said to his companion: "The roses and the jasmin are white with the pallor of Sittukhan's cheeks! Wait here for three days longer, while I go to look upon the cheeks of Sittukhan."

He entered the pavilion again and stayed three days with Sittukhan, admiring the white roses and the jasmin of her cheeks.

Then he rejoined the wazir and walked with him across the garden towards the gate, until the carob, with its long black fruit, rose up to meet him. He was moved by the sight of it, and said: "The carobs are long and black like the brows of Sittukhan. O wazir, wait here for three more days, while I go to view Sittukhan's brows."

He entered the pavilion again and stayed three days with the girl, admiring her perfect brows, long and black like carobs hanging two by two.

Then he rejoined the wazir and walked with him towards the gate, until a springing fountain with its solitary jet rose up to meet him. He was moved by this sight and said to the wazir: "The jet of the fountain is as Sittukhan's waist. Wait here for three days longer, while I go to gaze again upon the waist of Sittukhan."

He went up into the pavilion and stayed three days with the girl, admiring her waist, for it was as the slim jet of the fountain.

Then he rejoined the wazir and walked with him across the garden towards the gate. But Sittukhan, when she saw her lover come again a third time, had said to herself: "What brings him back?" So now she followed him down the stairs of the pavilion, and hid behind the door which gave on the garden to see what she might see. The prince happened to turn and catch sight of her face; he returned towards her, pale and distracted, and said sadly: "Sittukhan, Sittukhan, I shall never see you more, never, never again." Then he departed with the wazir, and his mind was made up that he would not return.

Sittukhan wandered in the garden, weeping lonely, and regretting that she was not dead in very truth. As she walked by the water, she saw something sparkle in the grass and, on raising it, found it to be a talismanic ring. She rubbed the engraved carnelian of it, and the ring spoke, saying: "Behold, here am I! What do you wish?" "O ring of Sulayman," answered Sittukhan, "I require a palace next to the palace of the prince who used to love me, and a beauty greater than my own." "Shut your eye and open it!" said the ring; and, when the girl had done so, she found herself in a magnificent palace, next to the palace of the prince. She looked in a mirror which was there, and marvelled at her beauty.

Then she leaned at the window until her false love should pass by on his horse. When the prince saw her, he did not know her; but he loved her and hastened to his mother, saying: "Have you not some very beautiful thing which you can take as a present to the lady who dwells in the new palace? And can you not beg her, at the same time, to marry me?" "I have two pieces of royal brocade," answered his mother, "I will take them to her and urge your suit with them."

Without losing an hour, the queen visited Sittukhan, and said to her: "My daughter, I pray you to accept this present, and to marry my son." The girl called her negress and gave her the pieces of brocade, bidding her cut them up for floor cloths; so the queen became angry and returned to her own dwelling. When the son learned that the woman of his love had destined the cloth of gold for menial service, he begged his mother to take some richer present, and the queen paid a second visit, carrying a necklace of unflawed emeralds.

"Accept this gift, my daughter, and marry my son," she said; and Sittukhan answered: "O lady, your present is accepted." Then she called her slave, saying: "Have the pigeons eaten yet?" "Not yet, mistress," answered the slave. "Take them these green trifles!" said Sittukhan.

When she heard this outrageous speech, the queen cried: "You have humbled us, my daughter. Now, at least, tell me plainly whether you wish to marry my son or no." "If you desire me to marry him," answered Sittukhan, "bid him feign death, wrap him in seven winding sheets, carry him in sad procession through the city, and let your people bury him in the garden of my palace." "I will tell him your conditions," said the queen.

"What do you think!" cried the mother to her son, when she had returned to him, "If you wish to marry the girl, you must pretend to be dead, you must be wrapped in seven winding sheets, you must be led in sad procession through the city, and you must be buried in her garden!" "Is that all, dear mother?" asked the prince in great delight, "Then tear your clothes and weep, and cry: 'My son is dead!' "

The queen rent her garments and cried in a voice shrill with pain: "Calamity and woe! My son is dead!" All the folk of the palace ran to that place and, seeing the prince stretched upon the floor with the queen weeping above him, washed the body and wrapped it in seven winding sheets. Then the old men and the readers of the Koran came together and formed a procession, which went throughout the city, carrying the youth covered with precious shawls. Finally they set down their burden in Sittukhan's garden and went their way.

As soon as the last had departed, the girl, who had once died of a morsel of flax, whose cheeks were jasmin and white roses, whose brows were carobs two by two, whose waist as the slim jet of the fountain, went down to the prince and unwrapped the seven winding sheets from about him, one by one. Then "Is it you?" she said, "You are ready to go very far for women; you must be fond of them!" The prince bit his finger in confusion, but Sittukhan reassured him, saying: "It does not matter this time!"

And they dwelt together in love delight.

"In the very name of Allah," cried Sultan Bibars to Gelal Al-Din, "I do not think that I have ever heard a better tale!" Then a tenth policeman, whose name was Helal Al-Din, came forward to the foot of the throne, saying: "I have a tale which is the elder sister of all these!" And he told:

THE TENTH CAPTAIN'S TALE

There was once a king who had a son called Muhamad. One day the boy said to his father: "I wish to marry." "That is right," answered the king, "but you must wait until your mother has passed the maidens of the harems in review." "I would rather choose for myself and see with my own eyes," objected the prince. So, when the king gave him leave, he mounted his horse, which was as beautiful as if it had come from fairy stock, and rode away from that city.

As the end of two days' journey he came upon a man sitting in a field, who cut leeks while his young daughter bound them into bundles. After greeting, the prince sat down beside the two and asked the girl for water. She rose and fetched him a cup, and he drank. Then, because the maiden pleased him, he turned to her father, saying: "O sheikh, will you give me the hand of your daughter in marriage?" "We are your servants," answered the old man. "I am rejoiced, O sheikh!" said the delighted prince, "Have the goodness to stay here while I go to my native city and make preparations for the wedding. I will soon return."

Prince Muhamad returned to his father, saying: "I am betrothed to the daughter of the sultan of leeks." "So they have a sultan, then?" asked the king, and his son replied: "Yes, and I am going to marry his daughter." Then cried his father: "Glory be to Allah, my son, that He has given a sultan to the leeks! Since the daughter pleases you, we will send your mother to leek land, to see father leek, mother leek, and the leek girl." "Very well," answered Prince Muhamad.

The queen set forth and found the daughter of the sultan of leeks charming in each respect and fitted by Allah to be the consort of a king's son. Her heart went out to the girl and she embraced her, saying: "I am the queen, my dear, I am the mother of the prince who visited you a short time ago. I have come to marry you to him." But the girl replied: "If your son is a prince, I will not marry him." "Why?" asked the astonished queen. "Because," answered the girl, "I will never wed a man who does not work with his hands."

The queen returned in anger to the city, and said to her husband: "The chit of leek land will not marry our son." "Why?" asked the king. "Because," answered the queen bitterly, "she will only wed one who practises a trade." "She is quite right!" exclaimed the king. But the prince fell ill when he learnt of this refusal.

So the king ordered the sheikhs of all the corporations into his presence, and said to the first, who was the sheikh of the carpenters: "You, how long would it take you to teach my son your trade?" "Two years, at least," answered the man. The king bade him step aside, and asked the sheikh of the blacksmiths: "How long would it take you to teach my son your trade?" "Exactly a year," replied the man. So the king bade him step aside, and questioned all the other sheikhs in turn; but they all asked one year, two years, three years or four years, in which to teach their trades. The king was about to give way to despair when he saw a little man, obscured by all the rest, who was dancing up and down, and clicking his fingers. "Why do you dance up and down, and click your fingers?" he demanded, and the little man replied: "So that our lord the king might notice me. I am poor, and the sheikhs of the corporations did not tell me of this meeting. I am a weaver, and will teach my trade to your son in one hour."

The king sent away all the sheikhs and provided the weaver with coloured silks and a loom, saying: "Teach my son your art." So the weaver turned to the prince, and said: "Watch me! I do not say do this, or do that; I simply say, open your eyes and watch me! Watch the way my hands go in and out!"

In less time than it takes to tell, the weaver wove a handkerchief under the attentive eyes of the lovesick prince; then he said to his pupil: "Come here now and weave a handkerchief yourself." The youth sat down immediately at the loom and wove a most remarkable handkerchief, working in pictures of the palace and the gardens.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-fifty-second Night
Had Come

She said:

The weaver took the two handkerchiefs to the king and asked him to decide which was the prince's work and which his own. Without a moment's hesitation, the king pointed to the one which bore the design of the palace and the gardens, saying: "This is your work, and the other is also your work." But the weaver cried: "By the merits of your glorious ancestors, O king, I swear that the handsome handkerchief was woven by your son, and the other one, the ugly one, by me."

The pleased king appointed the weaver to be sheikh of all the sheikhs of the corporations, and then said to his wife: "Take our son's work and show it to the daughter of the sultan of leeks; tell her that he is by trade a weaver."

The prince's mother carried the handkerchief and the message to the leek girl, who marvelled and exclaimed: "I am ready to marry him now!"

The king's wazirs sent for the kadi and bade him write out a marriage contract. The wedding took place, and the prince went in to the leek girl, who bore him numerous sons, each marked upon the thigh with the semblance of a leek. Every one of these children learnt a trade and, consequently, passed his life in prosperous content. But Allah knows all!

Then said Sultan Bibars: "This tale of the daughter of the sultan of leeks has an excellent moral. But have the rest of you no tales?" So another policeman, the eleventh, whose name was Salah Al-Din, kissed the earth, and said:

THE ELEVENTH CAPTAIN'S TALE

A son was born to a certain sultan at the same time as a blood mare in the royal stables dropped a foal. So the sultan said: "The foal is written in the luck of my new-born son and shall belong to him."

Now, while the boy grew up, his mother died, and the mare died at the same moment.

Days passed and the sultan married another wife from among the palace slaves. And after that he put the boy to school, neither loving him nor setting a watch upon him. So, whenever the child returned from school, he would go into the stable and greet his horse; he would caress him, give him food and drink, and tell him of his grief and loneliness.

The slave who had become queen kept a lover, a Jewish doctor (Allah curse the same!). And these two found themselves hindered in their unlawful meetings by the presence of the boy. Therefore they took counsel together and resolved to poison him.

That day, when the prince returned from school, he found his horse in tears. So, as he gentled him, he asked why he was weeping. "For your death," answered the horse, "Your stepmother and that vile Jew have distilled a poison from a black man's skin, and mean to put it in your food. Beware, beware, dear master!"

Thus it happened that the prince was on his guard when the queen set food before him, and, before she could prevent the act, he threw the contents of his plate to the palace cat, who ate greedily and died upon her hour. Then the prince rose up and left the apartment, as if he had noticed nothing.

The woman and the Jew asked each other: "Who can have told him?" and answered each other: "None but his horse." So the woman pretended to be ill, and the king summoned the foul Jew to examine her, because he was the court physician. "There is but one cure for her," said the Jew, "The heart of a foal dropped by a blood mare, of such and such a colour." "There is but one animal in my kingdom which fulfils that condition," answered the king, "and it belongs to my motherless son." So, when the boy came home from school, his father said to him: "Your stepmother, the queen, is very ill, and the heart of your horse is the only cure for her." "It is permitted," replied the prince, "but I have never ridden him and would like to do so once before he dies." The king gave his permission, and the lad mounted his horse, in the presence of the whole court, and galloped across the polo ground, and beyond, until he disappeared from the sight of men. Riders were sent after him, but could not come up with him.

At length the prince came to another kingdom and halted to rest by the garden of another king. Then his horse gave him a tuft of his hairs and a fire stone, saying: "If you have need of me, burn one of these hairs. For the time being, it will be better if I leave you, so that my presence may not interfere with the progress of your destiny." When they had come to this agreement, horse and rider embraced and separated.

The prince sought out the chief gardener of those royal gardens, and said to him: "I am a stranger here. Can you not take me into your service?" "I can," answered the man, "for I have need of someone to drive the bullock of the water-wheel." So the prince went to the water-wheel and drove the bullock.

Now the king's daughters were walking in the garden, and the youngest looked upon the boy who drove the bullock and loved him. Without showing her feeling, she said to her sisters: "How long are we to stay without husbands? Does our father mean to let us sour? Our blood will turn upon us!" "What you say is true," answered her sisters, "we are souring and our blood is turning upon us." So the seven went to their mother, and said to her: "Does our father wish us to sour, and our blood turn upon us? Can he not find us husbands who will prevent such accidents?"

The queen repeated this conversation to the king, who at once sent out a herald to summon all the young men of the city to pass beneath the palace windows, because the princesses wished to marry. All the young men passed beneath the palace windows, and, when one of them pleased a princess, she dropped her handkerchief upon him. Soon six of them had chosen husbands and were content.

When the king was told that his youngest daughter had not thrown her handkerchief, he asked: "Is there no other youth left in the city?" and they answered: "There is none except the beggar boy who drives the bullock of the water-wheel." Then said the king: "He also must pass, although I know full well that no daughter of mine would choose him." The servants of the palace immediately fetched the prince and hustled him below the palace windows. But, behold! the youngest princess threw her handkerchief to him. And the king, her father, fell ill from shame and vexation.

The court physicians came together and ordered their royal patient to drink bear's milk, fetched in the skin of a virgin bear. "That should be an easy matter," said the king, "I have six sons-in-law, heroic horsemen, quite unlike that seventh, that water-wheel brat. Tell them to bring me the milk!"

The six sons-in-law mounted their handsome steeds, to ride forth in quest of the bear's milk, and the prince departed after them mounted upon a lame mule, so that all the people mocked him. But, when he had come to a place apart, he struck the fire stone and burnt one of the hairs. Then his horse appeared, and, after the two had embraced, the boy asked him for his advice.

At the end of a certain time the six sons-in-law returned, bringing with them a bearskin bottle filled with bear's milk. But when the queen had sent her eunuchs with this bottle, that the physicians might examine its contents, the wise men said: "It is the milk of an old bear, and the skin is the skin of an old bear. These things would only harm the king."

Soon, the eunuchs brought up a second bottle to the queen, saying: "This was left at the door by a youth more beautiful than the angel Harut." "Take it to the doctors," said the queen. When the doctors had examined the second bottle and its contents, they cried: "This is what we sought! The milk is the milk of a young bear, and the skin is the skin of a virgin bear." They gave the king to drink and he was cured instantly. "Who brought my cure?" he asked, and they replied: "A youth more beautiful than the angel Harut." "Give him the ring of my succession," cried the king, "and beg him to sit upon my throne. As soon as my youngest daughter is divorced from the water-wheel brat, I will marry her to my preserver."

When enough time had passed for the fulfilment of his orders, the king went into the throne hall and fell at the feet of a youth who sat in the seat of his royalty. Seeing his youngest daughter smiling beside the stranger," he said to her: "Well done, my child! I see that you have divorced yourself already from the water-wheel brat, and made free choice of my delightful saviour." "Dear father," she answered, "the water-wheel brat, the youth who brought you virgin bear's milk, and the prince who sits upon your throne, are one and the same person."

"Is that true?" asked the astonished king, and the prince replied: "It is most true. But, if you do not wish me to enter your line, your daughter is still a virgin and may be restored to you." But the king embraced him and took him to his heart; he celebrated the wedding of the two with great magnificence (for previously it had been without ceremony).

And, in the matter of husbandry, the youth carried himself so valiantly that his young bride was for ever prevented from souring and having her blood turn upon her.

After certain weeks, the prince returned to his father's kingdom at the head of a mighty army. He found that the king was dead and that his stepmother reigned with the stinking Jew for wazir. Without a second thought, he had them seized and impaled above an ardent fire, so that they were consumed as it were upon spits. So much for them.

But glory be to Allah, who lives and can never be consumed.

When he had heard this story, Sultan Bibars cried:

"It is a pity that there are no more tales!" So a twelfth policeman, whose name was Nasr Al-Din, came forward and said: "So far, I have spoken nothing, O king of time. And, after me, there will be nothing spoken, for nothing will be left to say." And he began:

THE TWELFTH CAPTAIN'S TALE

It is related—but is there knowledge save with Allah?—that there was once a king who had a barren queen. One day a Moor sought audience with him, saying: "If I give you a remedy by which your queen shall conceive and bear, will you give me your first son?" "Certainly," answered the king. So the Moor handed him two sweetmeats, one green and the other red, with these words: "Eat the green yourself, make your wife eat the red, and Allah will do the rest." Then he departed.

When the king had eaten the green sweetmeat and given his wife the red one, the woman conceived and bore a son, whom his father called Muhamad (a blessing be upon that name!). And the child grew up rich in all learning and with a most sweet voice.

Then the queen bore a second son, whom his father called Ali; and the child grew up unhandy in everything. Finally, she bore a third son, Mahmud, who grew up as an idiot.

At the end of ten years the Moor sought audience of the king again, saying: "Give me my son." So the king went to the queen and told her of the Moor's demand. "Never, never," she cried, "Let us rather give him Ali, the unhandy."

The Moor left the palace with Ali, and walked with him along the roads in the great heat, till noon.

Then he asked: "Are you not hungry or thirsty?"

"By Allah, what a question!" exclaimed the boy, "How can you expect me not to be both, after half a day without food and drink?" Then the Moor exclaimed: "Hum!" and led Ali back to his father, saying: "This is not my son. Let me see the three of them together and I will know my own." So the king made the three boys stand in line, and the Moor picked out Muhamad, the eldest, rich in all learning and with a most sweet voice.

The Moor walked for half a day, and then asked: "Are you hungry? Are you thirsty?" "If you are hungry or thirsty," answered Muhamad, "then I am hungry and thirsty also." The magician embraced him, saying: "That is well, that is very well, O Learned! You are indeed my son."

He led Muhamad into his own land in the heart of Morocco, and, taking him to a garden, gave him food and drink. Then he put a grimoire into his hand, and said: "Read this book!" The boy turned the pages but could not read a word; so the Moor flew into a rage, and cried: "You are my son, and yet you cannot read this grimoire? By Gog and Magog, and by the fire of the turning stars, if you have not learnt it by heart in thirty days, I shall cut off your right arm!" Then he left Muhamad, and walked out of the garden.

The boy pored over the grimoire for twenty-nine days, but, at the end of that time, he did not even know which way up to hold it. Suddenly he cast it from him, crying: "If there be only one day left before my loss, I would rather spend it in the garden than wearying my eyes with this old thing!"

He began to walk under the heavy trees, deep in the garden, and saw a young girl hanging by her hair from one of them. He hastened to free her and she embraced him, saying: "I am a princess, who fell into the power of the Moor. He hung me up here because I learnt his grimoire by heart." "And I am a king's son," answered Muhamad, "The sorcerer gave me thirty days in which to learn the grimoire, but I cannot read it and my loss is certain tomorrow." "I will teach you," said the girl with a smile, "but, when the Moor comes back, you must say that you have not been able to read one word." She sat down by his side and taught him the grimoire, kissing him much the while. Then she said: "Hang me up as I was before," and Muhamad did so.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-fifty-third Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

WHEN THE MOOR returned at the end of the thirtieth day, he bade the boy recite the grimoire. "How can I recite it," asked Muhamad, "when I cannot read a word of it?" Then the Moor cut off his right arm, and cried: "I give you another thirty days! If, at the end of that time, you have not learnt the grimoire, you may say farewell to your head." As soon as the sorcerer had departed for a second time, Muhamad went out to the girl, carrying his right arm in his left hand. When he had taken her down, she said: "Here are three leaves of a plant which I have found by chance. The Moor has been seeking it for forty years, to complete his knowledge of the chapters of magic. Apply them to the two parts of your arm, my dear.'' The boy did as he was told, and his arm was restored to its former state.

Then the girl read out of the grimoire and rubbed another of the magic leaves the while. Hardly had she spoken when two racing camels came up out of the earth and knelt down near them. At once the princess mounted one of these, and said: ''Let us each return to our parents. Afterwards you can come and ask for my hand in marriage. My father's palace is in such a place, in such a land.'' She kissed him tenderly, and they departed, one riding to the right and the other to the left.

Muhamad came to his father's palace, shaking the earth with the formidable gallop of his camel. But there, instead of telling his story, he handed over his mount to the chief eunuch, saying: ''Sell it in the camel market, but be sure to keep the halter of its nose.''

When the eunuch offered the camel for sale, a hashish seller came along and wished to buy it. After a great deal of chatting and chaffering, the animal changed hands at a very moderate price, for the eunuch, like all his kind, was no great hand at a bargain. He even sold the halter as a makeweight.

The hashish seller led the camel to the space in front of his shop and showed it off to the hashish eaters, his habitual customers. He set a bowl of water before it, while the takers of the drug laughed as if their hearts would break. But the camel placed its fore feet in the bowl and, when its new owner beat it and cried: ''Back, back, you pimp!'' threw up its hind legs and, diving head first into the water, disappeared.

The hashish seller beat his hands together, showing the halter which still remained to him, and crying: "Help, help, good Mussulmans! My camel is drowning in the bowl."

Folk ran up from all sides, and said to him: "Be quiet, O man, for you are mad! How could a camel drown in a bowl?" "Be gone!" he answered, "What are you doing here? I tell you that he dived in head first and disappeared. If you want further proof than this halter, ask the honourables who were with me." But the sensible merchants departed, calling over their shoulders: "You and your honourables are all mad together!"

While this scene was in the happening, the Moor bit his finger for rage at the disappearance of the prince and the princess. "By Gog and Magog," he exclaimed, "and by the fire of the turning stars, I will catch them, even if they are on the seventh planet!" He hastened to Muhamad's city and entered the market just as the hashish eater was bewailing his loss. Hearing talk of a halter and of a bowl which was both sea and tomb, he approached the man, saying: "My poor fellow, if you have lost your camel, I am ready for Allah's sake, to reimburse you. Give me the halter which remains to you, and I will refund the price you paid for the animal, with a hundred dinars in addition." The bargain was quickly concluded, and the Moor danced off with the halter, so light for joy that his toes scarcely touched the ground.

Now, beside other powers, this halter had the power of capture. The Moor had only to hold it out towards the palace, and Muhamad came at once to pass his nose into the loop of it; also at contact with the cord the boy was changed into a camel which knelt before the sorcerer.

The Moor mounted his new steed and urged it towards the dwelling of the princess. When the two came below the walls of the garden which surrounded the palace, the magician worked the cord to make the camel kneel; but this movement brought the halter within reach of Muhamad's teeth and he at once snapped it through, so that its power of capture was destroyed. Then, to escape his persecutor, the prince used the virtue of the cord to change into a large pomegranate and hang himself among the pomegranate flowers in the garden.

The Moor at once sought audience with the princess's father and, after humble greeting, said to him: "O king of time, I come to beg you for a pomegranate; my wife is pregnant and ardently desires to eat one. You know how great a sin it is to thwart the yearning of a woman in her state!" "But, my good man," answered the astonished king, "the season of pomegranates is not yet! All the trees of my garden are in flower only." Then said the Moor: "O king of time, if there is no pomegranate in your garden, I give you leave to cut off my head."

The king called his chief gardener, and asked: "Are there any pomegranates in my garden?" and, when the man answered: "But master, this is no time for pomegranates!" he turned to the Moor, saying: "Your head is forfeit!"

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-fifty-fourth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

BUT THE MOOR cried: "O king, before you cut off my head, will you not tell the gardener to look among the pomegranate trees?" The king consented to do this, and the gardener, going down to his trees, found a large pomegranate, the like of which he had never seen before.

When the king received the fruit, he was so astonished that he did not know whether to keep it for himself or to cede it to the childing woman. He sought the advice of his wazir, and the man asked him this question in return: "If the pomegranate had not been found, would you have cut off this Moor's head?" "Certainly," said the king, and the wazir replied: "Then justice demands that he be given the pomegranate."

The king held forth the fruit in his hand, but, as soon as the Moor touched it, it burst asunder, and all the grains were scattered on the floor. The sorcerer picked them up, one by one, until he came to the last grain, which had sought refuge in a little hole near the throne's foot, and which contained the vital essence of Muhamad. As the vile magician stretched out his neck towards this final grain, a dagger came up out of it and stabbed him to the heart, so that he spat out his unbelieving soul in a stream of blood.

Then Prince Muhamad appeared in his own delightful form and kissed the earth between the king's hands. At that moment, the princess entered and said to her father: "This was the youth who loosed me when I was hung by my hair from a tree." "Since that is so, you cannot do less than marry him," answered the king.

The wedding was celebrated with all due pomp, and that night for the young lovers was blessed among all other nights.

They dwelt together in sweet content, and had many sons and daughters. This is the end.

But praise and glory to the Only, to the One, who knows neither end nor beginning!

When Nasr Al-Din, the twelfth captain of police, had made an end of his tale, Sultan Bibars so exulted in his pleasure that he named all the captains chamberlains of his palace, with monthly stipends of a thousand dinars from the royal treasure. He made them his cup companions, and was never separated from them either in war or peace. The mercy of Allah be upon them all!

Then Shahrazade smiled and fell silent; and King Shahryar cried: "O Shahrazade, surely the nights are short when we get no more than this from your sweet mouth!" "O king of time, if such be your wish," answered Shahrazade, "I will begin another tale at once, and you shall find that it leaves those which you have already heard far, far behind." "I am sure that it will be admirable!" replied King Shahryar.

So Shahrazade said . . .

THE TALE OF THE SEA ROSE OF THE GIRL OF CHINA

It is related, O king of time, that there was once in a certain land of Sharkistan,—but Allah on high knows all!—a king called Zayn Al-Muluk, whose fame had gone out to the horizons of the world and who was the very brother of lions for valour and generosity. Though he was still young, he had two upstanding sons already, and a time came when, by the grace of Allah, a third was born to him, a child picked out among ten thousand, whose beauty dispelled the shadows as a girl moon at her full dispels them. As the boy's years increased, his eyes, those cups of drunkenness, troubled the wise with the sweet fires of their regard, his lashes shone like curved dagger blades, the curls of his musk black hair confused the heart like nard, his cheeks mocked the cheeks of young girls; his smiles were arrows, he walked nobly and daintily; the sun had dexterously painted a freckle on the left commissure of his lips; his breast was smooth and white as a crystal tablet, and hid a lively heart.

Zayn Al-Muluk delighted in his youngest son, and called together the court astrologers to cast his horoscope. They shook their sand and traced their figures in it; they murmured the major forms of divination, and then said to the king: "His lot is fortunate, and his star assures him infinite happiness. But it is written in his destiny that if you, his father, look upon him in his boyhood, your sight shall be destroyed."

The world grew dark before the king's face; he had the child taken from his presence and ordered his wazir to install him, with his mother, in a far away palace, so that he might never chance to see him in his goings to and fro.

These things were done, and years passed in which this flower of the royal garden, under the delicate guidance of his mother, blossomed in health and beauty. But no man may escape his destiny, and a day came when young prince Nurgihan mounted his horse and galloped after game into the forest. King Zayn Al-Muluk had gone there also, hunting the deer; and, in spite of the many miles of trees, Fate willed that he should meet his son. He glanced at him, without recognition, and sight forsook his eyes. He became a prisoner in the kingdom of night.

Knowing, by this terrible proof, that the young rider must be his son, he wept and cried: "The eyes of all fathers become brighter when they behold their sons; but mine are blind, are blind!"

He called the great doctors of that time to his palace, physicians more skilful than Ibn Sina, and consulted them concerning his blindness. When they had questioned him and considered together, they declared that the king was not to be cured by ordinary means. "The only remedy is so difficult to come by," they said, "that we cannot advise our lord to dream of it. It is the sea rose of the girl of China."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-fifty-fifth Night
Had Come

She said:

And they explained to the king that there dwelt in the far interior of China a princess, daughter of King Firuz-Shah, who had in her garden the only known tree of that magic sea rose which could cure the sight, even of those who had been born blind.

At once Zayn Al-Muluk sent heralds through his kingdom to announce that the man who brought the king the sea rose of the girl of China should receive half of the empire as a recompense.

Then he sat down to await the issue, weeping like Jacob, wasting like Job, and drinking the blood of his heart's either lobe.

Among those who set forth to seek the sea rose in China were the king's two eldest sons, and young Prince Nurgihan departed also. For he said to himself: "I wish to prove the gold of my destiny on the touchstone of danger; and, also, as I was the unwitting cause of my father's blindness, it is only right that I should risk my life to cure him."

Prince Nurgihan, that son of the fourth sky, mounted his wind-swift courser at that hour when the moon, riding the black palfrey of the night, had pulled his bridle to the East.

He journeyed for days and months, across plains and deserts and through solitudes peopled only by wild grass and the presence of God, until he came to a limitless forest, darker than the wit of ignorance and so obscure that in it was neither night nor day, black nor white. But the prince's shining face lit up the shadows, and he advanced, with a heart of steel, among trees bearing living heads which grinned and laughed and fell as he passed by, and other trees whose fruits were earthen pots, which cracked and let out birds with golden eyes. Suddenly he found himself face to face with an old and mountainous Jinni, seated on the trunk of an enormous carob. The youth saluted this figure, and dropped from the ruby casket of his mouth words which melted in the mind of the Ifrit like sugar in milk. Pleased by the boy's beauty, the giant bade him rest beside him; so Nurgihan got down from his horse and, taking a cake of flour and melted butter from his food sack, offered it to his new acquaintance as a token of friendship. The Jinni made one mouthful of it and then jumped for joy, saying: "This human food gives me more pleasure than an inheritance of that red sulphur which formed the stone of Sulayman's ring! By Allah, I am so delighted that, if each of my hairs turned to a hundred thousand tongues and each of those tongues were to sing your praise, the whole concert would fall short of the gratitude I feel. If you do not ask for some favour in return my heart will be as a porcelain plate dropped from a high terrace!"

Nurgihan thanked the Jinni for his engaging discourse, and answered: "O chief and crown of all the Jinn, O careful guardian of the forest, since you permit me to express a wish, I ask you to take me without delay to the kingdom of Firuz-Shah, for there I hope to pluck the sea rose of the girl of China."

When he heard these words, the guardian of the forest heaved a cold sigh, beat his head with his hand. and lost consciousness. The prince heaped the most delicate cares upon him but they were unavailing until he thought to place a second sugar-and-butter cake in the giant's mouth. At once the large eyes opened, and the Ifrit, with his mind troubled by the excellence of the cake and the difficulty of the wish which he had heard, said sorrowfully to Nurgihan: "O my master, the sea rose of the royal girl of China is guarded by certain aerial Jinn, whose business it is, day and night, to prevent the birds from flying above it, to ward off the drops of rain from its cup, to forbid the sun to burn its petals. Even if I transport you to the garden, I do not see how we are to elude the vigilance of those guards, for they greatly love the sea rose. I am perplexed in the extreme; but if you will give me another of those excellent cakes, which have done me so much good, perhaps the inspiration of it will bear some scheme. I have made a promise, I have sworn to bring you to the rose of your desire."

Prince Nurgihan gave the guardian of the forest another cake, which he dropped into the cavern of his throat, before wrapping his head in the hood of cogitation. Suddenly he lifted his eyes, and said: "The cake has done its work! Seat yourself on my arm and we will fly together to China; for I have found the simplest of all ways to distract the attention of those Jinn: I will throw them one of these astonishing sugar-and-butter cakes."

At these words, the boy, who had known great anxiety when the Jinni of the forest swooned, grew calm again and blossomed like the young rose and freshened like the grass of the garden after rain. "It is permitted," he said to the Jinni.

So the giant took the prince on his left arm and flew through the air towards China, shielding his burden from the near rays of the sun with his right hand, devouring distance in his flight. Soon he came to the capital city of China and set Nurgihan down at the entrance of that marvellous garden where dwelt the sea rose. "You can enter with a calm heart," he said, "for I go now to distract the guards with that cake. You will find me waiting for you here, when you have finished your business."

The prince entered the garden and found it a morsel of high Paradise, as **lovely as a vermilion** evening.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-fifty-sixth Night
Had Come

She said:

In the middle of this garden was a lake filled to the brim with rose-water, and in these scented waves a fire red flower bloomed from a single stem. This was the admirable sea rose; none but the nightingale could find description for it.

Drunken with the beauty and smell of it, Prince Nurgihan threw aside his clothes and, plunging into the scented water, pulled up the rose tree by its roots. Then he swam back with his delicate burden, dried and dressed in the shade of the trees, and hid his prize in his mantle, while the birds among the reeds gave the stream tidings of the rape.

But he would not leave the garden until he had visited a delightful pavilion, built of Yemen carnelians, which stood beside the water. Entering, he found himself in a high hall, containing an ivory bed studded with jewels and shaded by artfully embroidered curtains. He opened these curtains with his hand and stood spellbound at the sight of a tender girl, who lay couched upon cushions with no vest or ornament save beauty. She slept deeply, little knowing that a human gaze had pierced the veil of her mystery. Her hair was in disorder, and her white hand with its five dimples was thrown up carelessly to touch her brow. The negro of night had fled into her musk-tinted hair, the sisters, the Pleiades, had veiled themselves in cloud before the bright chaplet of her teeth.

This was none other than Lily-Brow, the girl of China, and the sight of her nakedness cast Nurgihan to the floor in a swoon. When, at length, he came to himself with a cold sigh, he whispered in the sleeping ear of the princess:

They would sell silks to me,
But I came by your bed
And with my fingers tested the dark subtlety
Of your hair instead.
You are dressed in the narcissus and the rose
And those
Appear to me
As cool as the palm-tree.
You sleep on purple tissue;
Surely to me
Your face is the fair issue
Of dawn from thence
And your light eyes the excellence
Of stars above the sea.

Then, as he wished to leave the sleeper some token of his entrance to that place, he changed rings with her. As he left the pavilion, he said over to himself:

I leave this garden with a blood-red tulip
Deep in my heart for wound and ornament.
Unhappy he, who from a greater garden
Were called with no flower in his tunic fold,
Nor time to gather one before he went.

He found the guardian of the forest waiting for him at the gate, and begged him to fly straight to the kingdom of Zayn Al-Muluk in Sharkistan. "To hear is to obey!" answered the Jinni, "But not until you have given me another cake." So Nurgihan gave him the last cake, and was instantly borne aloft and carried towards Sharkistan.

They came, without difficulty, to the palace of the blind king, and there the Jinni said to his young friend: "O capital of my life and joy, I will not leave you without one mark of my solicitude. Take this tuft of my beard hairs, and, when you have need of me, burn one of them." So saying, he kissed the hands which had fed him, and went upon his way.

Nurgihan sought audience of his father and, when he was introduced into the royal presence, drew the miraculous sea rose from under his mantle and handed it to the blind king. No sooner had the sufferer brought his eyes close to the blossom, whose odour and beauty drifted the soul of all who stood there, than his eyes became as bright as stars and beheld the colours of the world again.

In joyful thanks the king kissed his son upon the brow and pressed him to his heart in tenderness. He made proclamation throughout his kingdom that henceforth he but shared the empire with Nurgihan, and gave order that royal rejoicings should be held for a whole year, to open the door of pleasure to all his subjects, rich and poor, and shut the door of heaviness against them.

Now that there was no danger of his father becoming blind again, Nurgihan was re-established in the king's favour, and had no thought but to plant the sea rose so that it should not die. To this end he burnt one of the Jinni's beard hairs and, when the guardian of the forest appeared, begged him to see to the matter. So the giant hollowed out a fountain basin between two rocky peaks of the garden, in a single night. Its cement was of pure gold, and the foundations of it were jewels. The prince planted the sea rose in the midst of it, and she became again an enchantment to the nose and eyes.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-fifty-seventh Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

BUT, IN SPITE of their father's cure, the two eldest sons, who had returned from China with drooping noses, pretended that the sea rose had no miraculous virtue, and that the king had only recovered his sight through sorcery and the intervention of the Stoned One.

Zayn Al-Muluk was equally angry at their insinuation and their lack of discernment. He brought them together in the presence of their brother Nurgihan, and talked to them severely, saying; "How can you doubt the effects of the sea rose on my sight? Do you not believe that Allah, who brings forth woman out of man and man from woman, may as easily set healing in the heart of a rose? Listen, and I will tell you the apt adventure of an Indian princess.

"There was once, in the antiquity of time, a king of India who held in his harem a hundred women, chosen from the myriad beauties of that land. But none of these conceived or bore a child; and this was a grief to the king, for he was old and bent. At length, however, Allah permitted the youngest of his wives to become pregnant and bear a daughter of exceptional loveliness.

"Fearing that her lord would be vexed that her offspring was not a son, the mother put about the statement that she had borne a boy, and concerted with the astrologers to make the king believe that he must not look upon his heir until he was ten years old.

"When the girl approached that age, her mother taught her carefully how she might pass as a boy; and the quick child learnt her lesson so well that she came and went in the royal apartments, dressed in a prince's garments, and a very prince in all her behaviour.

"The king rejoiced more and more each day at the beauty of his heir and, when five more years had passed, determined and made preparation to marry him to the daughter of a neighbouring sultan.

"At the time appointed, he had his son dressed in a magnificent robe, and set out with him, in a gold palanquin upon an elephant's back, to the country of the bride. And in such embarrassing circumstance the counterfeit prince wept and laughed by turns.

"One night, when the royal procession had halted in a leafy forest, the princess left the palanquin and went apart among the trees to satisfy a need which is imperative even upon princesses. Suddenly she found herself face to face with a young and handsome Jinni who sat on the ground below the branches, and was the guardian of that forest. Dazzled by her beauty, the creature gave her gentle greeting, and asked who she was and what might be her business in that place. Wooed to confidence by his engaging air, she told her story in all its details and gave expression to those fears which she had for the bridal night.

"The Jinni was moved by her embarrassment and, after a moment's reflection, generously offered to lend her his sex in its entirety and to take hers, on condition that she would hold the former in strict trust and return it when it had served her purpose. The princess gratefully accepted his proposition, and, by Allah's grace, the exchange was affected without difficulty or complication. Light with delight and heavy with her new merchandise, the girl returned to her father and climbed up again into the palanquin; but, as she was not yet used to her novel ornaments, she sat down clumsily upon them and rose with a cry of pain. Yet she controlled herself so quickly that the accident was not noticed; and she took great care to run no such risk in future, to avoid both suffering and any harm she might do to a thing which she was engaged to return in working order to it owner.

A few days after this, the train arrived at the bride's city, the marriage was celebrated with great pomp, and the groom fulfilled his part of the rites in such fashion that the bride became pregnant on that night, and all concerned rejoiced.

"At the end of nine months the girl gave birth to a delightful boy, and, when she had risen from her bed, her husband said to her: 'It is time that you came with me to my father's court to see my mother and my kingdom.' This he said only as an excuse to set out; for his real intention was to return the Jinni's gift, which, during these nine agreeable months, had developed and improved in beauty.

"The young wife consented to her lord's proposal, and the two set forth. When they reached the forest where the Jinni dwelt, the prince left the caravan and betook himself to the spot where the exchange had been made. There he found the Jinni, sitting in the same place, visibly fatigued and with a monstrous belly. After greeting, he said: 'O chief and crown of the Jinn, thanks to your benevolence I have done my duty well; now I come to return your property, greater, and improved in beauty, and to receive my own.' He would have handed over the thing, but the Jinni answered: 'Your faith is a great faith and your honour is commendable, but I regret to have to tell you that I am no longer anxious to reverse the exchange we made. Destiny has ruled that the matter should end with the first barter. After we parted something happened which forbids any resumption of our former states.' 'And what was that, great Jinni?' asked the prince. 'O one time maiden,' answered the Ifrit, 'I waited here for you, sedulously guarding the thing which you had left in my care and sparing no pains to keep it in its original state of white virginity. But one day a fellow Ifrit, the intendant of these regions, passed through the forest and came to see me. He knew by my changed smell that I was carrying a sex hitherto foreign, and fell violently in love with me. When he had excited a like sentiment in my heart, he joined himself to me in the usual manner and broke the precious seal of the packet which I had in care. I felt all that a woman would feel in like circumstances, and determined that a female's pleasure is more durable and more delicate than a male's. I am now pregnant by my future husband and could not possibly give back your sex without running the risk of great pain and tearing in my labour. Therefore I can only beg you to keep my loan and to give thanks to Allah that no harm at all has come from our exchange.' "

When he had told this story to his two eldest sons in the presence of their brother Nurgihan, the king continued: "Thus it is proved that nothing is impossible to the might of the Creator. He who can change a girl into a boy, and a Jinni into a pregnant woman, could, without difficulty, set a cure for blindness in the heart of a rose." He dismissed his two other sons and kept Nurgihan by him to receive all the love and prerogative of his reign. So much for Zayn Al-Muluk and his sons.

Now we must return to Princess Lily-Brow, the girl of China, the bereft mistress of the sea rose.

When the Perfumer of the sky had set the sun's gold plate, filled with the camphor of the dawn, within the eastern window, Princess Lily-Brow opened the magic of her eyes and stepped from bed. She plied her comb, tressed her hair, and walked, with the pleasant balance of a swan, to the sheet of water which nourished her sea rose. For her first thought each morning was of that flower. She walked through the garden. Its air blew as from some aromatic shop, and the fruits of its branches were flasks of dyed sugar hung in the wind. The morning was fairer than all mornings and the alchemic sky had the colour of glass and turquoise. Flowers sprang up where the rose feet of the girl had trodden, and the dust which the fringes of her robe sent flying was a balm for the eyes of the nightingale.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-fifty-eighth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

SO SHE CAME to the rose-water lake and saw that her dear flower had gone. She was ready to melt like gold in the crucible, to fade like a flower in the hot wind; for, at the same moment that she perceived the flame flower's place empty, she noticed that the ring she wore was strange.

Remembering the nakedness of her sleep and realising that treacherous eyes had violated the delightful mystery of her form, she was tossed by the waves of confusion and wept in her pavilion all that day. But, after this, reflection brought her reasonable thoughts, and she said to herself: "How false is the proverb which says: *There is no track where no track has been left, for, were there track, it had been left!* And a greater lie is the saying: *One must lose oneself to find a lost thing.* For, as Allah lives, though I am weak and young, I will set out in quest of the thief of my sea rose and punish the man who has slaked the desire of his eyes on the nakedness of a sleeping princess."

She left her father's kingdom on the wings of impatience, followed by a train of girl slaves dressed as warriors; and, by dint of questioning, came at last to Sharkistan and to the kingdom of Zayn Al-Muluk, father of Nurgihan.

She found the capital gay for the year-long festival of rejoicing, and heard the playing of music from each door. Still in her man's disguise, she asked the reason of this excitement, and people answered: "The king was blind, but his excellent son Nurgihan succeeded, after incredible adventures, in curing him with the sea rose of the girl of China. It is to celebrate the return of his sight that we are commanded to rejoice for a whole year at the royal expense and to play music at our doors from morning to night."

Lily-Brow rejoiced to hear these certain tidings of her rose, and went down to bathe in the river after the fatigues of her journey. Then she dressed again as a youth and walked delightfully through the markets towards the palace. Those who saw her were effaced with admiration more quickly than the marks of her little feet upon the sand, and the coiled ringlets of her hair twisted about the hearts of the merchants.

Thus she came to the royal garden and saw the sea rose blossoming, as of old, in the scented water of its gold pond. After a rapturous recognition of it, she murmured: "I will hide under the trees to catch a sight of the pert fellow who stole my rose and ring."

Soon the prince came down to the rose's pond. His eyes, those cups of drunkenness, troubled the wise with the sweet fires of their regards, his lashes shone like curved dagger blades, the curls of his musk black hair confused the heart like nard, his cheeks mocked the cheeks of young girls, his smiles were arrows, he walked nobly and daintily; the sun had dexterously painted a freckle on the left commissure of his lips; his breast was smooth and white like a crystal tablet, and hid a lively heart. Lily-Brow fell into a kind of amazement when she saw him, and almost lost her wits; for the poet had done this boy no more than justice, when he wrote:

If in a throng of base and true men mixed
He sped his shafts, that are in madness bathed
All noble hearts thereby would be transfixed,
And all unworthy hearts would go unscathed.

When Lily-Brow came to herself, she rubbed her eyes and looked for the youth, but he was no longer there. "Oh, oh," she murmured to herself, "the man who stole my rose has taken my heart also! He who broke the rare flask of my honour upon the stone of his eyes' seduction has sent an arrow to my heart as well. Alas, from whom shall I seek justice for these assaults? I have no mother to do me right in this strange land."

Her heart was burning with passion as she went back to her maidens; she sat down among them and, taking paper and reed, wrote a letter to Nurgihan. This she sent with the changeling ring by the hand of her favourite follower, who found the prince sitting and dreaming, it must have been, of Lily-Brow. He was thrown into a trouble of the heart when he recognised his ring, and this became more intense when he opened the paper, and read:

"After homage to the free Master of How and Why, who has given beauty to maidens and the dark eye of seduction to young men, lighting a lamp in the heart of both so that the moth of wisdom shall be destroyed.

"I die of my love for your eyes of languor; the flame devours me. How false is the proverb which says: *A heart will hear a heart;* for I am consumed, and you know nothing of it. What defence will you make if I accuse you of assassination?

"But write no further, O pen; for you have said too much."

An answering fire took hold of Nurgihan as he read these words. As restless as quicksilver, he took paper and answered thus:

"To her who queens it over all the silver-bodied fair, the curve of whose brows is as a sword in the hands of a drunken soldier!

"Star-fronted lady of light, jealousy of China, your letter has torn open the wound in my lonely heart. My lonely heart beats for you as many times as there are freckles on the full of the moon.

"A spark from your heart has fallen upon my wound, and the blaze of my desire has caught your harvest. Only a lover knows the joy of wasting away. I am like a half-killed fowl which rolls on the ground day and night, and will die if it be not lifted.

"O Lily-Brow, there is no veil upon your face, but you are yourself your veil! Come forth from behind it, for the heart is an admirable matter, and, though it be very small, Allah has made His house there!

"O charm, I must not speak more clearly or confide more secrets to my pen, for he is of too masculine a shape to be allowed into the harem of a lover's heart."

Nurgihan folded this letter, sealed it with his favourite seal, and, as he gave it to the messenger, begged her to say all the delicacies of passion to her mistress as a supplement to what he had written.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-fifty-ninth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

THE GIRL FOUND her mistress waiting with eyes like the hearts of jonquils bathed in tears; so she greeted her with a smile, saying: "O rose upon the tree of joy, may the reason for these tears staining the petals of your face recoil on me and leave you ever laughing! I bring good news!" And she gave Nurgihan's letter, together with all the delicacies of passion as a supplement to what he had written.

As soon as Lily-Brow had read and had her joy confirmed by the slave's words, she rose and bade her girls prepare her.

The pretty women used all their art; they combed and scented her hair until the musk of Tartary had fumed off in mist for jealousy, and hearts danced to see her braids falling below her hips, tressed like palm trees on a day of festival. They put a belt of red lawn about her waist, and each of its threads was a hunting noose. They draped her in rose-tinted gauze which confessed her body, and put drawers upon her of royal amplitude and a more cloudy texture, sewn to enslave the world. They braided the long division of her hair with pearls until the stars of the milky way were cast into confusion. They put a diadem upon her brow, and then were thrown into a trance by the picture they had made. Yet her beauty was more than all their art.

Thus dressed, Lily-Brow went again with beating heart to the garden trees about the rose's pond. When Nurgihan saw her below the branches, he swooned away, but the scent of her sighs brought his lids fluttering open again, and he lay upon the zenith of delight as he looked up at her. Lily-Brow found the prince so exact a counterfeit of the picture graven upon the leaves of her heart that she set aside the veil of desire and gave him all her gifts: lips more to be desired than rose petals, silver arms, the moonlight of her smile, her cheeks' gold, the musk of her breathing, passing the musk of Tartary; the almonds of her eyes, her curls' black amber, the apple of her chin, the diamonds of her glances, and the thirty-six carven poses of her maiden body. Love bound his threads about their breasts and brows, and none may know what happened under the trees that night between so fair a two.

As neither love nor musk can be ignored for ever, parents on both sides learnt of the affair and hastened to wed them.

They passed the remainder of their lives between loving and looking at the sea rose.

Glory be to Allah who sends both love and roses! And prayer and peace be upon our master and lord Muhamad, the Prince of Messengers, and upon all his line!

When Shahrazade fell silent, little Doniazade cried: "O my sister, your words are sweet and delicate, fair and refreshing! How admirable is this tale of the sea rose and the girl of China! Please, please tell us another like it while there is yet time tonight." "I have a better, little one, should our king permit," answered Shahrazade with a smile; and Shahryar cried: "Have no doubt of my permission, Shahrazade! Henceforth, shall I ever be able to pass a night without your speech in my ears and your body before my eyes?" Shahrazade thanked him with another smile, and said: "In that case I will tell you The Tale of the Honey Cake and the Cobbler's Calamitous Wife."

And she said:

THE TALE OF THE HONEY CAKE & THE COBBLER'S CALAMITOUS WIFE

It is related, O auspicious king, that there was once, in the fortunate city of Cairo, a cobbler of liberal sympathies and excellent disposition, who earned his bread by patching old slippers. His name was Maruf, and Allah (may His name be exalted!) had afflicted him with a calamitous wife. She was called Fattumah, but her soul had been so steeped in tar and pitch that the neighbours nicknamed her Hot-Slop, knowing that she was an itching plaster upon the cobbler's heart and a black misfortune to any eye. This shrew used and abused the patience of her man, cursed him a thousand times a day, and never gave him any sleep at night. As time went on, therefore, Maruf began to tremble at her evil deeds and fear her wickedness. He was a wise and sensitive man, jealous of his good name even in its poverty; so he would hand over all his money to the caprices of this dry wasp to avoid dispute. If, by ill fortune, he did not earn enough during his day's work, his ears were doomed that night to be filled with shrieking and his eyes with formidable domestic scenes. Sometimes the hours which should have been spent in sleep were darker for the poor man than the book of his destiny, and he might well have murmured these words of the poet:

Hopeless at night I squirm
Beside the rough-legged worm
I call my wife.
On that dark funeral day
When we were wedded, say
Where was my knife?
Where the cold poison cup
For her to tipple up
And sneeze out life?

You shall hear one of the many afflictions suffered by this Job of patience.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-sixtieth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

HIS WIFE CAME into his presence one day—Allah remove such days!—and said to him: "O Maruf, I wish you to bring me back a *kenafa* cake tonight. Let it be dripping with bee honey." "O daughter of my uncle," answered poor Maruf, "if Allah of His generosity allows me to make enough money today, I will gladly bring you the *kenafa*. At present I have not one copper piece, yet perhaps He will take compassion upon me." But the shrew cried: "What is all this talk of Allah? Do you think I am going to wait upon a benediction? If you do not bring me an ounce of *kenafa*, dripping with bee honey, your night shall be blacker than the destiny which betrayed you into my hands! I am not going without, to please

Allah or anyone else!" "He is merciful and generous!" sighed the cobbler with the sweat of affliction streaming down his brow.

When he had opened his shop in the cobblers' market, he lifted his hands on high, praying: "O lord, grant that I earn enough to buy an ounce of *kenafa,* and save myself from the hands of that vile woman!" But, in spite of this, no man brought him any work that day and he did not earn even enough to buy a crust of bread for supper. It was with trembling fingers that he locked his shop, and upon trembling feet that he set out towards his home.

But his way lay past the shop of a pastrycook whose shoes he had often mended, and the man, seeing him walk by in evident despair, with his back bent under some heavy weight of grief, called to him, saying: "Master Maruf, why do you weep? What is your trouble? Come in here and rest while you tell me all about it." Maruf approached the delightful counter, and exclaimed after greeting: "There is no power or might save in Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate! Destiny pursues me and will not even allow me supper." Then, as the pastrycook insisted on further details, he told him of his wife's demand and how impossible it was of obedience.

When the man had heard all, he answered with a good natured laugh: "At least you might tell me how many ounces of *kenafa* your good lady requires." "Perhaps five would be enough," answered Maruf.

"Then let it not trouble you," cried the benevolent cook, "I will let you have the five ounces and you can give me the price when Allah returns to you with His favour." He cut off a large slab of *kenafa* and set it in a dish, where it swam among butter and honey. As he set the dish in Maruf's hand, he said: "This is worthy of a king's table. I have not made it with bee honey but with sugarcane honey, a change from the usual which improves it greatly." The cobbler, who had known neither sort of sweetening in his life, would have kissed his saviour's hand, but the man prevented him, saying: "The cake is written in the destiny of your wife, O Maruf. You yourself have nothing for supper and I insist on handing you this trifle of bread and cheese which Allah intended for you." He added to his other splendid present a fresh warm-smelling roll and a round of white cheese wrapped in fig leaves; and Maruf, who had never been so rich in all his days, could find no words with which to thank such charity. As he left, he lifted his eyes to heaven to make it witness of his gratitude.

As soon as he entered his house, his wife cried in a harsh and menacing voice: "Have you brought the *kenafa?*" "Allah has been generous and it is here," he replied, as he set the crisp and bearded sweet before her in its golden bath.

But the calamitous woman had no sooner set eyes on the dish than she uttered a cry of strident indignation and, beating her cheeks, exclaimed: "Allah curse the Stoned One! Did I not tell you it must be made with bee honey? You have brought me golden syrup to spite me! Did you imagine that I could not tell the difference? Do you wish to thwart me into my grave, you dog?" Poor Maruf, who had certainly expected a very different reception, babbled excuses with a trembling tongue, and said: "O daughter of excellent parents, I did not buy this *kenafa;* one of Allah's compassionate pastrycooks had pity on me and gave it to me with indefinite credit."

But, even so, the terrifying shrew thus broke in upon him: "These are but words and help you not at all! Take your dirty treacle *kenafa!*" With that she threw the confection at her husband's head, dish and all, and bade him rise up for a pimp and bring her another made with honey. At the same time she buffetted him so heartily on the jaw that she broke one of his front teeth and caused the blood to spurt over his beard and breast.

At this last aggression poor Maruf ever so little lost his patience and gave an instinctive gesture with his hand which lightly brushed the woman's head. This natural reaction to his pain increased her rage; she seized his beard with both hands and hung from it with all her weight, crying: "Help, O Mussulmans, help! He is killing me!"

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-sixty-first Night
Had Come

She said:

The neighbors ran in answer to her cries and, coming between the two, had great difficulty in freeing the cobbler's tortured beard from the clutching fingers of his wife. Seeing the broken tooth, the bloody beard, and the wrenched hairs, and being well aware, from old experience, of the terrible life which Maruf led with the woman, they lectured her with so much reason and eloquence that surely any but herself would have been shamed and converted. "We all most gladly eat treacle *kenafa*," they said, "and find it better than the other kind. What crime has your husband committed to deserve a broken tooth and a plucked beard?" Then they cursed her in chorus and went their way.

When they had gone, the raging termagant, who had sat silent in a corner during their harangue, muttered at Maruf with suffocating hate: "So you raise up the neighbours against me! You shall see, you shall see!"

As she sat glaring at him with tigress eyes, the cobbler tried to placate her by collecting the *kenafa* from the broken bits of the dish and assembling it cleanly upon one of their own plates. Then he offered it to his wife, saying timidly: "Eat a little of this one, sweetheart, and tomorrow, if Allah wills, I shall bring you the other." But she repulsed him with a kick, and answered: "Begone with it, O dog of botchers! Do you think that I will touch the wages of your shameful trade with pastrycooks? Tomorrow, by Allah's grace, I shall destroy you utterly!"

After this, the wretched Maruf, who found truce with his wife more difficult than any other job of patching, gave up the attempt and turned his thoughts to the hunger which had been gnawing him all day. He sat down before the plate and ate, first, all the delicious mouthfuls of the *kenafa,* then the roll, and finally the cheese until not a fragment remained. This meal he made to the accompaniment of: "May it choke you!" and: "May it poison you!" delivered with flaming eyes. He did not answer any of these amenities, and the woman's disappointment culminated in a paroxysm of fury, during which she cast the furniture of the room at her husband's head. At last she threw herself upon the couch, where she continued to curse him in her sleep all through the night.

Maruf rose early and dressed in haste; he opened his shop betimes, hoping that Allah might send him money with which to satisfy his wife's extravagant demand. But he had not been seated long before two policemen arrested him by order of the kadi, bound his hands behind his back, and led him to the tribunal. When he had been hustled into the judge's presence, he beheld his wife standing with her arm bandaged, her head wrapped in a bloodstained rag, and a broken tooth held in her fingers. As soon as the kadi saw the terrified cobbler, he cried: "Come here! Have you no fear of Allah that you violently attack this poor young woman, and wound her arms and break her teeth?" Maruf wished the ground might open and swallow him; his confusion, his desire for peace, his regard for his good name which would not let him call the neighbors as witnesses, led him to keep silence. The kadi, construing this silence as confession, bade his guards cast the afflicted man to the floor and give him a hundred stripes with the stick on the soles of his feet. While this sentence was cruelly carried out, Hot-Slop Fattumah watched with gloating eyes.

Maruf dragged himself away from the tribunal to a ruined house on the banks of the Nile, where he waited for the swelling of his feet to die down. He would rather have tasted red death than seek his home again and, therefore, when he could walk, he hired himself to the captain of a river boat. He dropped down the Nile, and came in good time to Damietta, where he signed on as sailmender aboard a certain felucca and confided his destiny to Allah.

After a voyage of several weeks, the felucca was stricken by a terrible tempest and sent to the bottom of the sea. All were drowned save Maruf, whom

Allah delivered by placing a fragment of the mainmast beneath his hand as he struggled in the water. Thanks to the unnatural strength which the love of dear life will give a man, the cobbler was able to climb astride this piece of wreckage. He beat the water with his feet as if they had been oars. The waves made him their plaything and cast him dizzily to left and right; for a day and a night he wrestled with the deep; but, on the second morning, the wind and the current set him ashore near a well-built seaside city.

He lay motionless on the sand and soon fell into a deep sleep; when he woke, he saw a richly-dressed stranger bending above him, flanked by two slaves with folded arms. This man was examining Maruf's body with singular attention and, as soon as he saw the cobbler's eyes open, he cried aloud: "Glory to Allah! O wanderer, be welcome to our city!" Then, in a lower voice, he said: "In Allah's name, tell me your land and city, for, by the remnants of your clothes, you would seem to be an Egyptian." "You are right, master," answered Maruf, "I am an Egyptian, and Cairo is the city of my birth and dwelling." "Would it be indiscreet to ask in what part of Cairo you live?" asked the rich man in a trembling voice. "In the Red Street, master," replied the cobbler. "What folk do you know in that street?" demanded the man, "And what is your trade, my brother?" "I am a cobbler; I patch old shoes," said Maruf, "The folk I know are of the commoners, of my own kind, but honoured and respectable for all that. Here, if you wish them, are some of their names." And he said over the names of several neighbors who lived in Red Street.

The rich man, whose face had more and more lighted at these answers, asked again: "O brother, do you know sheikh Ahmad, the perfume seller?" "Allah increase you!" cried Maruf, "He is my neighbour, our walls are one." "Is he well?" asked the rich man. "Thanks to Allah, he is very well," answered Maruf. "How many children has he now?" asked the man. "Still three, may Allah preserve them!" answered Maruf, "Still Mustapha, Muhamad, and Ali." "What do they do with themselves?" asked the man, and Maruf answered: "The eldest, Mustapha, is a schoolmaster in a monastery. He has fame as a scholar; he knows the Holy Book by heart and can recite it in seven different manners. Muhamad, the second, is a druggist and perfume seller, like his father. The old man has just opened a shop for him near his own, to celebrate the birth of a grandson in Muhamad's house. As for little Ali—may Allah shower blessings upon him!—he was the companion of my childhood; we amused ourselves together every day, and played a thousand tricks upon the people. But a time came when Ali did what he did with a little Coptic boy, a child of the Nazarenes, who ran to his parents and told them that he had been humbled and outraged in a disgraceful way. Poor Ali had to fly the city to escape the vengeance of those Christians. He has not been heard of for twenty years. Allah shower blessings upon him, I say again!"

At these words the rich man threw his arms about Maruf's neck and drew him to his breast, weeping and saying: "Glory be to Allah, to the Reuniter! O Maruf, I am Ali, the son of Ahmad!"

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-sixty-second Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

AFTER THE FIRST mutual transports of joy, Ali begged Maruf to explain his presence on that coast. When he learnt that the cobbler had not eaten for a day and a night, he took him up behind him on his mule and carried him to his own splendid palace, where the servants magnificently entreated him. It was not until next morning that Ali was free to talk again with his old friend, but eventually the two sat together in comradeship and Maruf told the torments of his life since his calamitous marriage. He explained how he had chosen to abandon his shop and native land rather than remain any longer a prey to that vixen, how he had been beaten on the feet, how he had been wrecked and well-nigh drowned.

Then, in his turn, Ali told his friend that they were in Khaitan, the capital of Sohatan, that Allah had favoured him in his dealings, and that he was now the richest merchant and the most respected noble in all the city.

When each had given rein to his memories, Ali, the rich merchant, said to his friend: "Maruf, my brother, the blessings which Allah has showered upon me are not mine, I only hold them in trust for Him. Can I make better use than to give a great part of them to you?" He presented him with a bag of a thousand gold dinars, dressed him in sumptuous garments, and then said: "Tomorrow morning you shall mount my best mule and ride to the market, where you will find me sitting among the most substantial merchants of the city. When I see you I will rise and greet you, I will hold the reins of your mule, I will kiss your hands, and pay you every possible respect. This proceeding will gain you great consideration at the outset, and I will complete the effect by lending you a vast and well-stocked shop. You will speedily become acquainted with the best people, your affairs will prosper under Allah, and you will rejoice in that calm which only wealth and far absence from a nagging wife can give.'' Maruf could find no words with which to thank his friend; he would have kissed the hem of his robe but Ali prevented him and embraced him. Afterwards they talked of this and that, reviewing their childish past, until it was time to sleep.

Next morning Maruf dressed magnificently to appear as some rich foreign merchant, mounted a superb grey mule and rode to the market at the appointed time. Then the little drama played itself as arranged between himself and Ali, until all the merchants were overwhelmed with admiration and respect for the stranger. When they saw Ali kiss his hand and help him from his mule, when they saw the newcomer seat himself slowly and gravely on a prepared seat in front of Ali's shop, they came one after another to their old friend, saying in a low voice: ''Surely he is some great merchant!'' Ali looked at them in pity as he answered: ''Some great merchant did you say? He is one of the first merchants of the world. He has more shops and storehouses over the earth than the fires of the earth could well destroy! I am only a wretched pedlar when compared with him. His partners and agents and counting-houses are the honour of every city, from Egypt and Yemen to India and the far frontiers of China. By Allah, you will see what kind of a man he is, when you get to know him well!''

Hearing this testimonial delivered in the accents of exact truth, the merchants flocked round Maruf with salute, congratulation, and welcome. Each hurried to ask him to dinner, while he smiled complacently and begged to be excused on the ground that he had already accepted the hospitality of his friend Ali. The syndic of the merchants came to greet him in his place, contrary to the custom which demands that the first visit be paid by the newcomer, and exerted himself to give particulars of prices current and the principal industries of that land. Then, to show that he was ready to help this stranger to make a brisk trade in the goods which he had brought so far, the syndic said: "Doubtless, my master, you have many bales of yellow cloth? There is a great demand for yellow cloth in this city." "Yellow cloth?" answered Maruf without a moment's pause, "I have, I believe, a vast quantity of it." "And gazelle blood red?" asked the syndic. "As for gazelle blood red," answered Maruf with assurance, "I do not think that my customers will have any complaint to make on that score. We are supposed to have the finest gazelle blood red in all the world." To all such questions, he returned the same answer: "Plenty! Plenty!" until the syndic timidly asked: "Would you be so good as to show us a few samples?" Maruf took this difficulty in his stride, and replied with a certain condescension: "Certainly, as soon as my caravan arrives, certainly!" Then he explained to his questioner and the other merchants that he expected a caravan of a thousand camels in a few days. And the very thought of this held them spellbound.

But their marvel at him did not reach its limit until they witnessed the following prodigy. While they chatted together, opening wide eyes at the details of the caravan, a beggar approached them and held out his hand to each in turn. Some gave the man a copper piece, some half a copper piece, and the majority contented themselves with saying: "May Allah pay you!" But Maruf drew out a great fistful of gold dinars and gave them as simply to the afflicted man as if they had been a copper. After this a silence fell upon that company, and all were thinking over and over again: "How rich this man must be!"

In this way Maruf's reputation increased from hour to hour, until it reached the ears of the king, who called his wazir to him, saying: "O wazir, a caravan of extraordinary richness is expected at my city, to the address of a merchant stranger. Now I do not wish those wolves of the market to make their profit from this coming, for they are already far too rich. This time I am determined that we of the court shall benefit, my wife your mistress, my daughter the princess, and myself." "There seems no harm in that," answered the wazir, who was a wise and prudent man, "but do you not think that it would be better, O king of time, to wait until the caravan comes, before taking the necessary steps?" The king grew angry at this, and cried: "Are you mad? Does one buy meat when the dogs have devoured it? Bring the rich merchant instantly into my presence and I will speak to him!"

When the wazir, in spite of his nose, had brought Maruf into the presence, the cobbler bowed low and kissed the earth before the throne, making a delicious compliment. The king marvelled at his choice language and distinguished manner, and asked him many questions concerning his business and great wealth. But Maruf was content to answer with a smile: "Our lord the king shall see and be satisfied when my caravan arrives." Therefore the king believed in Maruf and, to test him, showed him a wonderful great pearl worth at least a thousand dinars. "Are there such pearls in your caravan?" he asked. Maruf held the jewel in his fingers for a moment, examining it disdainfully, and then threw it to the earth and broke it with a strong blow of his heel. "What are you doing, O man?" cried the stupefied sultan, "You have broken a pearl worth a thousand dinars." "Yes, it was worth quite that," replied the cobbler with a laugh, "but I have whole sacks of infinitely larger and more beautiful in my caravan."

After this the king's greed knew no bounds, and he said to himself: "I must catch this prodigious fellow for my daughter."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-sixty-third Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

THEREFORE HE TURNED to Maruf, saying: "O honoured and most distinguished emir, will you accept my only daughter, your slave, as a gift to celebrate your coming to our land? If you are willing, I will marry you to her and you shall reign over the kingdom after my death." Maruf, who had adopted a pose of modest reserve answered discreetly: "The king's suggestion honours his slave. But do you not think, my lord, that it would be better to wait until my great caravan arrives before celebrating the marriage? The dowry of a princess, such as your daughter, would entail an expenditure which I am not in a position to undertake for the moment. You will understand that I must give my wife a bridal portion of at least two hundred thousand purses of a thousand dinars each. Beyond that, I shall have to distribute a thousand purses of a thousand dinars to the poor and needy on the night of penetration, a thousand further purses to those who come with gifts, and a thousand purses for the price of the feast. Then there will be necklets of a hundred large pearls for each of the women in the harem, and compliments to you and my aunt the queen of uncounted jewels and sumptuous novelties. It is an expense which I can hardly compass before my caravan comes in.''

This prodigious enumeration won the king's heart even more than the delicacy of Maruf's attitude. ''No, by Allah,'' he cried, ''I myself will pay all the expenses of the marriage! You can give me my daughter's dowry when your caravan comes in. I insist on the marriage taking place as soon as possible, and give you free leave to take all that you require of ready money from the royal treasury. Have no scruple, my son, for all that is mine is yours.''

He called his wazir, and said to him: ''Tell the sheikh Al-Islam that I wish to speak with him concerning the immediate marriage of my daughter and the emir Maruf.'' The wazir lowered a disconsolate head and said nothing; but, when the king began to grow impatient, he came closer, and whispered in his ear: ''O king of time, this fellow does not please me, his manner bodes no good to the court. I pray you, by your dear life, to wait at least until we have more certain proof of the existence of this caravan; for a princess like your daughter, O king, is worth more than the convenience of an unknown adventurer.''

The king saw the world darken before his face, and cried angrily: "O execrable traitor, O you who loathe us, you only say these things because you wish to marry my daughter yourself. But that is far from your nose's destiny, I tell you. If you do not instantly cease from troubling my mind and swaying it against this polished, high-souled, and exceedingly wealthy gentleman, I shall become vexed and utterly destroy you." He paused, and then cried on in rising excitement: "Perhaps you wish my daughter to be left on my hands until she is old and unacceptable? How could I ever find a more perfect son-in-law than this generous, charming, and discreet young man? Not only is he almost certain to love the princess, but he will make us all rich, I tell you, make us all rich! Begone and fetch the sheikh Al-Islam instantly!"

So the wazir went out, his nose trailing well-nigh to his feet, and fetched the sheikh Al-Islam, who wrote out a marriage contract for Maruf and the princess.

The city was decked and lighted by the king's orders, festival and rejoicing sounded everywhere, and Maruf, the cobbler, who had seen black death, red death, and all calamity, sat on a throne in the courtyard of the palace. A crowd of ballad-singers, wrestlers, players, drummers, clowns, buffoons, and jolly mountebanks, surged round to entertain the court, and Maruf had the wazir bring sack after sack of gold to cast among the shouting, singing, dancing mob. Nor did the wazir have any rest that day, for no sooner had he come to Maruf's throne, bending under the weight of a thousand thousand dinars, than he was sent back for another load. These extravagant celebrations lasted for three days and far into the fourth night, which was the night of penetration. The bride's procession was of great magnificence, for the king had willed it so. Each woman, as she passed, showered presents about the princess, and her girls gathered them up and set them aside. But, when the girl was taken to the bridal chamber, Maruf went himself to a corner of it, and muttered: "Plague on plague on plague on plague! Come what will, it is no fault of mine! This is destiny, O slipper patcher, O wife beaten, O Maruf, O you ape!"

When the two were left alone and the princess lay at ease beneath the silken curtains of the couch, Maruf sat down upon the ground and beat his hands together in despair. As he made no move to join her, the girl thrust her delightful head out of the curtains, saying: "Why so far off and sad, my handsome lord?"

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-sixty-fourth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

MARUF HEAVED A sigh and answered, as if with effort: "There is no power or might save in Allah!" "How so, my master?" asked the girl in a trembling voice, "Do you find me ill-made or ugly, or is it some other grief which tortures you?" "It is your father's fault," said Maruf with another sigh. "What harm has he done?" she demanded; and he replied "Harm? Surely everyone has noticed my disgusting meanness, my niggardly treatment of you and your ladies? The king was very wrong when he did not let me wait the coming of my caravan. At least I should have been able to give you a few necklaces with five or six rows of mighty pearls, at least a few fair robes undreamed of by princesses, at least a few jewelled toys not quite unworthy of you; at least I could have appeared before your guests as something better than a cheese-parer. But your father would hurry on the match and betray me into a false position. It was like burning green grass." At once the princess answered: "Instead of bothering about such trifles, undress and come to me. Leave this thought of presents and the like, for I am indifferent to your caravan and all your wealth. That which I want is much more simple, my dear, and much more interesting. Need I implore you further, my darling!"

But Maruf could not so easily still the trouble in his mind and his was not the mood of the rapturous high-hearted bridegroom, but rather of one upon whom care rode with a spurred boot. "I still maintain," answered Maruf, "that your father did me a grievous wrong in thus hurrying matters. Had my caravan arrived, then I could have treated you as is meet for a bridegroom but now . . ." he made a gesture of despair, but he was really only trying to stave off his inevitable destiny. "My master," said the princess, "if you continue thus to insult me with your silly words and trifling griefs over mere baubles, I will avenge the dishonour to myself threefold."

"Here it is at last!" cried Maruf to himself as he arose from his corner and advanced towards the princess. As he drew near the tender girl he thought: "Can this be Maruf, the cobbler of Red Street?"

He leaned over his rose-petal bride and kissed the carnelian of her lips. The honey of her mouth was as rare wine, making his heart dance with joy and erasing the furrows of thought from his mind in a single instant. Maruf, who had been so long used to the horrible Fattumah, had well nigh forgotten that there may be that which is pleasurable between men and women as well as that which is hateful and noxious. Now his youth rushed back upon him pell mell and with it such a love for his princess as defies the telling. Every drop of blood in his veins seemed to sing canticles of praise of this fair young bride. Maruf had lived so many bitter, barren years that the fine phrases which come to all men when they would woo, did not spill from his lips in little tinkling cascades. But his eyes spoke with all eloquence. They were as piercing Damascene daggers; as twin points of flame. Desire came strong upon him and Maruf realised that what is written is written. Straightening up suddenly, he began to quickly remove his clothes.

Then, after the night had passed and morning came, Maruf rose and went to the hammam, followed by the happy sighing of his bride. After he had bathed and dressed himself in a magnificent robe, he entered the diwan and sat upon the right hand of the king, his father-in-law, to receive the felicitations of the emirs and great folk. On his own authority he sent for the wazir and ordered him to distribute robes of honour to all who were present, to make vast gifts of money to the emirs and the wives of the emirs, to the great folk and the wives of the great folk, to the guards and the wives of the guards, and to all the eunuchs great and small, and old and young. Also he had sacks of dinars brought to him and pressed handfuls of them on any who would take them. Thus all the people loved him and prayed that he might have a long life which if it be happy is Allah's best gift.

He filled twenty days with incalculable generosity, and twenty nights with attendance upon his wife, so that she loved him also.

At the end of this time there was no news of Maruf's caravan, and his insane prodigalities had gone so far that, one morning, the royal treasure was found by the wazir to be quite empty. He went in perplexity of spirit and burning with concealed rage, to say to the king: "May Allah spare us all ill news! But I must tell you, since silence would be culpable, that the treasure has run dry and that the marvellous caravan of your son-in-law has not yet come to fill the empty sacks." The king became a little disquieted, and answered: "By Allah, it is true that the caravan is a few days late, but it will surely come." Then said the wazir with an evil smile: "Allah prolong your days, my master, and shower His blessing upon you! But you must confess that we have fallen on evil times since the emir Maruf came among us, I see no way out of our embarrassment, for there is no more money, and your daughter is already married to this unknown man. Allah save us all from the Evil One, the Far One, the Stoned One!" "Your words weary me," answered the king, who was by this time very frightened indeed, "Instead of showing off your powers of speech, you would be more useful if you suggested some way to remedy the situation and to prove, if such be the case, that my son-in-law is a liar and a fraud." "You are very right, O king," agreed the wazir, "A man should not be condemned before he is found guilty. In my opinion none but your daughter can come to the truth of the matter. Call her here, I beg, and let me question her from behind the modesty of a curtain." "It is permitted," cried the king, "and, by the life of my head, if that Maruf be proved to have deceived us, his death shall be dark indeed!"

As Maruf was absent from the palace at the time, the king at once had a curtain stretched across the hall and caused his daughter, the princess, to sit behind it.

When the wazir had thought out his plan of attack, the king called across the curtain to his daughter, bidding her speak with the wazir. "What do you wish, fellow?" she cried back; and the wazir answered: "Dear mistress, the treasure of the reign is empty, thanks to the prodigalities of the emir Maruf; also the caravan, of which he has spoken so much, has not yet given any sign. Therefore the king, your father, has empowered me to ask what your opinion is of this stranger, what effect he has produced upon your mind, and what suspicions you may have formed of him during the twenty nights which you have had together."

"Allah bless the emir Maruf! Allah preserve my husband!" answered the princess, "You ask me what I think of him? I answer, nothing but good. There is no sugar-stick on earth to be compared with him for sweetness and pleasure. Since I have been his bride, I have become fat and beautiful, so that, when I pass them, people say: "Allah preserve such beauty from the evil eye!' My husband is a compost of all delights; he is my joy and I am his. Long may we dwell together!"

The king turned to the disconcerted wazir, saying: "You see? My son-in-law is entirely to be trusted. You deserve to be impaled for your suspicions." But the wazir questioned again through the curtain, saying: "And what of the caravan, my mistress?" "What can that matter to me?" she answered, "Will my delight be less or more because of its coming?" "Yet, if it does not come," asked the wazir, "who will provide food for my lady now that the treasure chests are empty? Who will find money for the expenses of her husband?" "Allah is generous and will not forsake His own," retorted the princess, and the king checked the wazir, saying: "Hold your tongue! My daughter is quite right." Then he continued through the curtain: "Yet there would be no harm, my dear, in trying to find out approximately on what day your husband expects his caravan. I would like to know, simply in order to regulate my payments and see if it will be necessary to levy new taxes to bridge the interval." "I hear and I obey," replied the princess, "I will ask Maruf tonight and tell you what he says."

So, at nightfall, when the two lay side by side, the princess put her hand below her husband's armpit, and took on that pleasant, tender, caressing, honey-sweet air which every woman has at her command when she would gain an end.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-sixty-fifth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

"LIGHT OF MY EYES," she said, "fruit of my liver, seed of my heart's berry, life of my soul, the fires of your love compass my breast and I am ready to give my life for you, to share your destiny however dark. Hide nothing from me, I beg by your sweet life. Tell me, sweet, that I may guard the secret in my heart of hearts, why that great caravan, of which my father and his wazir talk so much, has not yet come. If you are doubtful or embarrassed concerning it, confide in me and I will discover a way to help you." Then she pressed him to her breasts and melted in his arms. "My dear," answered Maruf, with a burst of laughter, "why go by-ends to ask so simple a thing? I am quite ready to tell you the truth."

He stayed silent for a moment, to swallow his spit, and then went on: "Sweetheart, I am no merchant, no master of caravans; I own no wealth or other calamity. In my own country I am a jobbing cobbler, married to a pest of a woman called Fattumah Hot-Slop, a blister on my heart, a black calamity before my eyes. It happened one day. . . ." And he told the princess of his life with the woman in Cairo and the whole adventure of the honey cake. He omitted no detail of his shipwreck, of his meeting with the merchant Ali; but nothing would be gained by repeating his story in this place.

When the princess had heard all, she laughed so heartily that she fell over on her backside, and Maruf laughed also. "Allah is the Dealer of Destiny!" he cried, "You were written in my fate, O mistress!" "Indeed, Maruf," answered the girl, "you are a perfect master of stratagem; you have no equal for wisdom, cunning, and good luck. But what will my father say? And, above all, what will the wazir say, if the truth comes to be known? They will surely kill you and I will as surely die of grief. For the moment, your only course is to leave the palace and retire to some far country, until I can find a way of arranging matters and explaining your most inexplicable conduct. . . . Take these fifty thousand dinars and, when you have ridden to some safe retreat, let me know its position that I may send a daily courier with news and for news. That will be best, my dear." "I lie under your protection, mistress," replied the cobbler, "I put my trust in you." So the princess embraced him, and he remained with her until midnight.

Then she bade him rise, clothed him in the garments of a mameluke, and gave him the best horse in her father's stables. We will leave him riding away from the city, and pursue the tale of the princess, the king, the wazir, and the mythical caravan.

Early on the following morning, the king sat in the hall, with the wazir by his side, and summoned the princess into his presence. She took her place behind the curtain, as before, and asked: "What is it, O father?" "Tell us what you have found out, my daughter," answered the king, and the princess exclaimed: "What have I found out? Allah confound the Evil One, the Stoned One! May he curse all calumniators and especially blacken the black face of your wazir, who would have blackened mine and my husband's!" "How? Why?" asked the king, and his daughter continued: "Why? How? By Allah, is it possible that you confide at all in this sinister wazir? Do you not see that his whole business and hobby in life is to discredit my husband?" She fell silent for a moment, as if stifled by indignation, and then said: "If you must hear the secrets of my marriage, father, I will prove to you that there is no more upright and truthful man on earth than the emir Maruf, whom may Allah bless! At nightfall yesterday, just as my dear husband had entered my apartment, the eunuch of my service begged speech on a most urgent matter and brought in a letter which had been given to him by ten foreign mamelukes in costly raiment, who desired an audience with their master Maruf. My husband read the letter and then passed it to me. I found it to be from the commander of that very caravan which you so greedily expect. Now this commander was accompanied by five hundred young mamelukes to guard the riches of the convoy, and it appeared that these had been attacked by a band of cut-throat Bedouins, who would have disputed their right to pass. That was the first cause of delay. A few nights after they had beaten off this band, they were attacked by a second, greater and better armed. A bloody fight took place, in which the caravan lost fifty of the mamelukes, two hundred camels and four hundred bales of price.

"Yet, at this distressing news, my husband only smiled and tore up the letter; he did not even ask further particulars from those who waited below. 'What are four hundred bales and two hundred camels?' he said to me, 'All told it cannot be more than a loss of nine hundred thousand dinars. It is not worth speaking of; above all, it is not worth a moment's thought from you, my dearest. One aspect of the matter alone annoys me, that I shall have to leave you for a few days in order to go myself and hurry on the arrival of the caravan.' He rose with a jolly laugh and petted me a little, because I wept. When the stone of my heart's fruit had departed from me, I leaned from the window and saw him talking in the courtyard with ten mamelukes, as handsome as white moons. Soon he mounted his horse and rode away at the head of them, to hasten the coming of his caravan."

Here the princess blew her nose loudly, as one who has wept much, and continued in sudden spleen: "So tell me what would have happened, had I been indiscreet enough to question my husband in the way you wished? Or rather in the way your pitch-faced wazir wished? He would have looked askance at me, he would have ceased to trust me, he would have loved me no more, he would have very rightly hated me! And all because that calamitous old beard has an offensive mind!" So saying, she rose and went her way with a noise of angry draperies. "Son of a dog," cried the king of his wazir, "do you see what you have done now? As Allah lives, only my too clement heart preserves you from a merited death! Breathe but one further word of suspicion against my son-in-law, and see what you will get!" He gave him a terrible look from the corner of his eye, and left the diwan. So much for the king, the wazir, and the princess.

When Maruf had ridden far through desert places away from the city of Khaitan, he began to be assailed by great fatigue, for he was not used to riding royal horses and his cobbling had not fitted him for princely exercise. Also he began bitterly to regret that he had told the truth to the princess. "Now you must take to the road again," he grumbled, "instead of rejoicing in the arms of your butter-sweet bride, whose kisses had made you forget the calamitous Hot-Slop."

He fell to dreaming of dead lovers, whose hearts had been burnt by separation, until he wept tears of self-pity and broke into despairing verses. He groaned and exhaled his anguish in suitable mournful songs, until he came at sunrise to the outskirts of a little village. By this time he was famishing; for, in his haste to leave Khaitan, he had forgotten to provide himself with food. Therefore, seeing a peasant ploughing behind two oxen in a field, he approached him, and said: "Greeting, O sheikh!" "Greeting and the mercy of Allah and His blessings!" answered the peasant, "Doubtless, my master, you are one of the sultan's mamelukes?" When Maruf had answered that he was, the peasant continued: "Be very welcome, O milk-white countenance! Be so good as to dismount and accept my hospitality."

But the cobbler, who saw with the same glance that the man was generous and that his house was poor, excused himself, saying: "My brother, I fear I am too hungry to be content with what you could spare." "Allah's food is all found," replied the man, "if you will dismount and let me entertain you in His name, I will run instantly to the village, for it is near, and bring back provision for yourself and your noble horse." "Since the village is so close, my brother," objected Maruf, "would it not be better for me to ride there, than for you to run there? I could easily buy food in the market." But so great was the native generosity of the peasant that he could not persuade himself to let any stranger of Allah pass his dwelling; he went upon another tack, and answered: "But what is this market of which you speak, my master? There is no market in a miserable little village like ours, its houses all built of cowdung, or anything in the least like a market. We hardly buy and sell at all, for our poverty is self-supporting. I beg you, by Allah and His blessed Prophet, to alight at my house and give me the pleasure of receiving you. I can go swiftly to the village and come back twice as swiftly." Seeing that further refusal would grieve the good man, Maruf dismounted and sat down at the entrance of the dung hut, while the peasant made off towards the village as fast as his legs would carry him.

As he waited for his food, Maruf reflected: "I am a cause of loss and embarrassment to this poor man, whose state is much as mine was when I cobbled in Red Street. Why should I not make up for his lost time by working a little in his place?"

So he rose, dressed all in the gilded garments of a royal mameluke, and guided the plough along the line of the furrow. But the oxen had not taken many steps before the share came to a sudden standstill, striking with a curious sound against some obstacle. The beasts were thrown to their knees and, though Maruf goaded them up and they strained strongly against the yoke, the plough remained immovable as the Day of Judgment.

Maruf shifted the earth about the share and found that it had caught in a mighty copper ring, strongly sealed into a marble slab on a level with the tillage.

After he had tugged this way and that for a little, the slab moved to one side, and he saw below him a flight of marble stairs, leading down into a square vault as large as a hammam. Calling upon the name of Allah, Maruf went down into this place and found it composed of four separate and abutting halls. The first was filled from floor to ceiling with gold pieces, the second with pearls, emeralds, and coral, the third with hyacinths, rubies, turquoises, and diamonds; but the fourth, which was the greatest and best conditioned, held nothing save an ebony pedestal bearing a crystal box no larger than a lemon.

The cobbler rejoiced prodigiously at this discovery, but it was the little crystal box which first and most strongly tempted him. Forgetting the incalculable masses of treasure in the other halls, he lifted the transparent lid and found within the box a gold ring, bearing a carnelian bezel on which was engraved, in fine lines, certain talismanic writings which looked like the legs of ants. With an instinctive movement he passed the ring upon his finger and, as he fitted it, rubbed the stone.

At once a loud voice came from the bezel, saying: "I am here! I am here! For pity's sake do not rub me any more! Speak and I will obey! What do you lack? Shall I destroy or shall I build, shall I kill kings and queens or shall I bring them, shall I take forth a mighty city from the earth or shall I annihilate an empire, shall I root up a continent or cover it with flowers, shall I raze a mountain or dry up all the seas? I am your slave, by leave of the Master of the Jinn, Creator of the day and night. What do you lack? . . . But I beg you not to rub me hard, my lord." When Maruf realised that this voice came from the bezel of the ring, he asked: "O creature of God, who are you?" "I am the Father of Fortune, the slave of the ring," answered the carnelian voice, "Blindly I execute the orders of my master, and my master is he who holds the ring. Nothing is impossible to me; for I am the supreme captain of seventy-two bands of Jinn, Ifrits, Shaitans, Auns, and Marids. Each of these bands is composed of twelve million lusty irresistibles, stronger than elephants and subtler than quicksilver. But, though my power is thus enormous, I obey my master as a child obeys its mother. Of one thing only I must warn you; if you rub the bezel twice instead of once, I shall be consumed in the fire of the terrible names which are engraved upon this ring, and you will lose me for ever."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-sixty-seventh Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

"O EXCELLENT AND powerful Father of Fortune, I have stored your words in the heart of my memory," answered the cobbler, "Will you tell me who shut you into this carnelian and bent you to the power of the ring's master?" Then said the Jinni from the depths of the bezel: "The place where we now are, my master, is the ancient treasure of Shadad bin Ad, who built the city of Many-Columned Iram. While he lived

I was his slave and dwelt in his ring, the ring you have upon your finger now."

The one time cobbler of Red Street in Cairo had now become, thanks to the ring, direct heir to the line of Nimrod, and of Shadad, the proud hero who lived to the age of seven eagles. As he wished to make immediate trial of the bezel's power, he said to the Jinni of the carnelian: "O slave of the ring, could you carry all the treasure from this cave and lay it in the light?" "With the greatest ease," answered the Father of Fortune. "Then," said Maruf, "I bid you bear all these marvels above ground, so that not the littlest is left for any who may come after me." And the voice cried: "Ho, little boys, little boys!"

Maruf saw twelve lads of surpassing beauty appear before him, carrying mighty baskets upon their heads. They kissed the earth between his hands and then, in a series of lightning journeys, emptied the three halls of their treasure. Finally, they made new obeisance to the delighted cobbler and disappeared.

"This is perfection," said Maruf to the dweller in the carnelian. "Now I require chests, mules with drivers, and camels with their camel boys, to carry these things to Khaitan, the capital city of Sohatan." The slave of the ring gave an immediate cry and there appeared mules with drivers, camels with their camel boys, chests and baskets, and six hundred moon-fair mamelukes, gloriously clad. In the time that it takes to open and close an eye, the chests and baskets were loaded with treasure and placed upon the backs of mules and camels, and the caravan stood in order guarded by mounted mamelukes in a symmetrical square.

"And now, O Father of Fortune," continued the cobbler, "I require a thousand other beasts, loaded with silks and the precious fabrics of Syria, Egypt, Greece, Persia, India, and China.'' Hardly had the wish been spoken before a thousand camels and mules appeared at the tail of the caravan, laden with the required merchandise and guarded by a further square of mamelukes. Then Maruf was content, and said to the slave of the ring: ''Now I wish to eat. Pitch me a silk pavilion and serve me there with cool wines and chosen dishes.''

He had entered the consequent pavilion and was sitting down to his magic feast, when the benevolent peasant returned from the village. He carried on his head a wooden bowl of lentils cooked in oil, a black loaf and onions under his right arm, and, under his left, a peck sack of hay for the horse. When he saw the prodigious caravan drawn up before his house, and Maruf sitting in a silk tent, served by quick slaves and still slaves, he was troubled in his mind, and thought: ''Surely the sultan has come already, and that first mameluke was sent to announce him! It is a dishonour to me that I never thought of killing my two fowls and cooking them in cow butter.'' He determined to remedy this omission and was going towards the birds, when Maruf saw him, and said to his slaves: ''Bring that man to me!''

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-sixty-eighth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

THE SLAVES LED the peasant to the pavilion with his bowl of lentils, his onions, his black bread, and his peck sack; and Maruf rose in his honour and embraced him, saying: "What is it you carry, O my brother in misery?" The poor man was astounded at such affection from so great a personage; and, when he heard himself spoken of as a brother in misery, could not help thinking: "If this man is poor, what am I?" Then he answered: "My master, I was bringing the food of hospitality and a ration for your horse. You must excuse my ignorance; if I had known that you were the sultan, I should not have hesitated to sacrifice my two fowls and roast them in cow butter. But poverty takes the wits from a man and leaves him blind." And he hung his head in shamed confusion.

Maruf remembered his old condition, which had been even lower than this peasant's, and wept so that the tears fell down abundantly through the hairs of his beard into the magic dishes. "Be of good cheer, brother," he said, "I am not the sultan, but only his son-in-law. Certain difficulties rose between us and I left the palace. But now he has sent these slaves and these presents after me in sign that we are reconciled. I am about to turn back to the city, and I would have you know, O generous, who would have fed me without knowing me, that you have not sown in barren and ungrateful soil."

He made the peasant sit upon his right hand, and said: "You see a profusion of meats, but I swear by Allah that I will eat nothing save your lentils, your onions, and the good black bread!" He ordered the slaves to serve his friend with the sumptuous courses, and, as he ate the lentils himself, with the onions and the good black bread, rejoiced to see his rapture at the unknown dainties.

When the two meals had been eaten, Maruf gave thanks to Allah and led the peasant from the tent towards the caravan. There he obliged him to choose for himself a pair of camels and a pair of mules from each group, as they stood according to their loads. "These are your property, my brother," he said, "and I leave you the silk pavilion with all its contents." Then, turning a deaf ear to the man's thanks and excuses, he took leave and, galloping his horse to the head of the caravan, sent a rapid courier ahead to announce his coming to the king.

Maruf's messenger arrived at the place just as the wazir was saying to the king: "Be no longer deceived, I pray, dear master. Give no belief to your daughter's report of her husband's setting forth. For I swear, by the life of your head, that it was not to hasten his caravan (for there is no caravan) that the emir fled secretly by night, it was to save the skin of a liar and a cheat." The king, already half persuaded, was opening his mouth to answer, when the courier entered the presence and prostrated himself before the throne, saying: "O king of time, I come with good news! My master, the great and generous emir, the celebrated hero Maruf, rides behind me. But he stays with his caravan, which needs must go somewhat slowly because of its heavy splendour." So saying the young mameluke kissed the earth between the king's hands and departed as he had come.

The king rejoiced but his joy hardly kept pace with his fury against the wazir. "Allah blacken your face until it be as dark as your soul!" he cried, "May he curse your traitorous beard until you confess your lies!" Without a word the wazir threw himself at his master's feet, and the king left him to lie there, as he went forth to give orders for the lighting and decoration of the city, and for a procession to meet his son-in-law.

He visited his daughter's apartment and told her the good news. But, when the princess heard her father speak of the caravan which she thought she had invented piece by piece, she did not know what to say or how to answer. Was her husband mocking the sultan once again? Or had he tested her love with an invented tale of poverty? In either event, she thought it best to show a face of happy confidence and to hasten her father forth to meet the caravan.

But the most astonished of them all was incontestably the excellent Ali, the companion of Maruf's childhood. When he saw the whole city one bustle of preparation and learnt that it was being decked because the emir Maruf would soon come in at the head of a splendid caravan, he beat his hands together, and said to himself: "What new cobbler's trick is this? By Allah, I did not know that the botching of old slippers led to caravans! Yet all is possible to God, and I trust that He will at least preserve my old friend's honour from a public shaming!" Then he sat down to wait like all the rest.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-sixty-ninth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

SOON THE ESCORT, which had gone out to meet the caravan, returned to the city, and Maruf pranced at its head, triumphant, magnificent, a thousand times more splendid than a king, so that a pig, on beholding him, would have burst its gall bladder out of envy. As the caravan wound slowly in, with its vast complement of mameluke outriders in their costly uniforms, the people held their breath, and the merchant Ali murmured to himself: "I have it, he has fixed up some new trick with his wife, some new jest against the king!" He pushed his way through the packed crowd and came near enough to whisper to his friend: "What is all this, O sheikh of fortunate rascals, O cleverest of jugglers? And yet, by Allah, you deserve the glory! Make the most of it, and may He increase your tricks for our delight!" His old companion answered with a laugh and arranged a meeting with Ali for the morrow.

Maruf rode to the palace by the king's side and sat with him upon a throne set in the great audience hall. First he bade fill all the sacks of the treasury from the cases of gold and jewels, and then, with his own hands, began opening boxes of wealth and bales of precious stuffs. Their contents he distributed in a frenzy of generosity to the great folk and their wives, to the members of the diwan, to all the merchants whom he knew, and to the poor and lowly. In spite of the curses of the king, who hopped from one foot to another in an agony at this dispersal, he did not cease from giving, until the load of the caravan had been exhausted. As he threw double handfuls of gold or emeralds to left and right, the king would grimace and cry: "Enough, my son, enough! There will be nothing left for us!" But Maruf would always answer with a smile: "My wealth is inexhaustible."

Soon the wazir came and told the king that the treasure chamber was full and could hold no more. "Choose another hall and fill that," answered the king; and Maruf added, without looking up from his distribution: "Fill a third hall, fill a fourth! If the king did not mind, I could fill the whole palace with these worthless things." The wazir departed to garnish more and more halls for the reception of the treasure, and the king stood in a daze between sleeping and walking.

As soon as he had proved the worth of his caravan, Maruf hastened to his wife, who met him with tears of joy and kissed his hand, saying: "Was it sheer jest, my husband, or was it to try my love, that you told me that tale of poverty and despair with the calamitous Fattumah Hot-Slop? Which ever it was, I thank Allah that I behaved as I did!" Maruf embraced her and gave her a magnificent robe, a necklace formed of ten strings of forty orphan pearls as large as pigeons' eggs, and anklets chiselled by the hands of sorcerers. The princess cried out for joy as she saw these things, but said: "I must keep them for special occasions only." "Not so, my dear," answered the smiling Maruf, "I will give you them fresh and fresh each day, until your chests and cupboards can hold no more." And he remained with her until the morning.

He had not yet come from under the curtains, when he heard the voice of the king demanding admittance. He opened the door to him and saw him standing with terrified aspect and a yellow face. He helped him to a couch, and the princess sprinkled her father's face with rose-water until he was able to speak. At length he said distractedly: "Alas, alas, my son, I bring bad news! Shall I tell or shall I not tell?" "Tell, certainly," answered Maruf, and the king sadly continued: "All your mamelukes, your camels, and your mules, disappeared in the night, leaving less trace upon the roads than a bird when it quits a branch.

You are lost forever, and I am so upset that I do not know what I am saying.'' But Maruf laughed aloud. ''Calm your dear spirit and refresh your eyes!'' he said, ''The disappearance of these things is nothing to me. It is as the loss of one drop of water from the ocean. Today, tomorrow, the next day, and all the days of my life, might be filled with caravans and mamelukes, if I but wished it so. Calm your dear spirit, and let us dress in peace!''

The king was thrown into a greater amaze than ever by these words. He reported them to the wazir, and said to him: ''What have you to say this time? Does not the power of my son-in-law pass all understanding?'' ''Here is my chance of revenge,'' thought the wazir, who had not forgotten his many humiliations; and aloud he answered: ''O king of time, my poor advice can hardly be expected to throw light upon your darkness. But, since you ask me, I suggest that you make the emir Maruf drunk, if you wish to know the source of his riches. When his reason goes to dancing, you may question him skilfully and he will tell the truth.'' ''An excellent plan!'' exclaimed the king.

So, when evening came, the king sat with Maruf and the wazir before dishes of wine cups. And when these were passed and passed, the cobbler's throat became a barrel and his state a woeful state. As soon as his tongue went like a windmill and he could not tell his right hand from his left, the sultan said to him: ''My son, you have never told us the adventurous story of your life. I can well believe it to contain marvellous changes of fortune, which would rejoice us in the hearing.''

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When The Nine-hundred-and-seventieth Night Had Come

She said:

Maruf, with his mind hind-part-before and up-side-down, let the wine carry him to an extravagant vaunting (for that is the way of drinkers) and he told his life's story, from his marriage to Hot-Slop to the finding of the magic ring in the peasant's field.

The king and his wazir bit their hands as they looked at each other, and at length the wazir said to Maruf: "My dear sir, may we not be honoured with one little sight of the ring?" Immediately the foolish cobbler took the heirloom of Shadad from his finger and handed it to his enemy, saying: "Look at the carnelian! My old friend, Father of Fortune, lives there!" With glittering eyes, the wazir slipped the ring on to his own finger and rubbed the bezel.

Then said the voice from the carnelian: "Here am I! Ask and have! Shall I ruin a city, build an empire, or kill a king?" "O slave of the ring," answered the wazir, "I bid you take up this pimping king and cobbling bawd, and cast them down upon some waterless desert." Instantly the king and the cobbler were lifted like wisps of straw and set down on a savage plain, a desert of thirst, where red death and desolation kept house together. So much for them.

The wazir summoned the diwan and explained that the good of the State demanded the exile of the king and his son-in-law, together with his own accession to the throne. "Also," said he, "if one of you dares to be slow to recognise the new order, I shall send him to join them in the red wilderness of thirst and death!"

The nobles swore fealty in spite of themselves, and the wazir, after appointing some and abasing others, sent this word to the princess: "Prepare to receive me, for my desire is great." The princess, who had already heard of the wazir's revolt, sent back a eunuch to say for her: "Soon I will receive you with great pleasure, but, for the moment, I have that necessary evil which is common to women and young girls. When I am clean of all taint, I will send for you." But the wazir made reply: "I know nothing of necessary evils, or of yearly evils for that matter, and desire to visit you at once." "Come then and find me," said the princess by her eunuch.

She dressed herself with great magnificence, scented herself sweetly, and received the wazir with a smiling face. "What an honour!" she said, "What a delightful night we shall have together!" She used her eyes as snares for the traitor's heart and, when he pressed her to undress, began to do so with a thousand voluptuous delays. Suddenly she uttered a cry of terror and started back, veiling her face. "What is the matter, my mistress," demanded the wazir, "Why this cry, this veiling of the face?" "Do you not see?" she answered, from below her coverings. "As Allah lives, I see nothing!" swore the wazir, but she cried again: "O shame! O great dishonour! Would you show me naked to that strange man?" "Where, where?" shouted the wazir, looking to left and right. "There, in the carnelian of your ring," said she. "By Allah, that is true. I had not thought of it," confessed the wazir, "But, dear lady, that is no man, no human; that is an Ifrit!" "An Ifrit, oh, my sorrow!" moaned the princess, burying her face in the cushions, "I am terribly afraid of Ifrits! For my sake, put him away!" So the wazir, in his eagerness to come to conclusions with her, took off the ring and hid it under the pillow of the bed. Then he came nearer to her joyfully.

She let him approach, and then kicked him so violently in the belly that he rolled head over heels on the floor. With a movement as of light, she snatched up the ring and rubbed the bezel, saying to the Ifrit: "Cast this pig into the lowest dungeon of the palace, and then bring me back my father and my husband, safe and well!"

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-seventy-first Night
Had Come

She said:

At once the wazir was plucked up, like a bundle of old clothes, and cast into the lowest dungeon of the palace. At the same time the king and Maruf appeared suddenly in the princess's room, the king in the last stages of fright and Maruf hardly recovered from his drunkenness. She received them with expressions of delight and, seeing that their swift journey from the desert had roused hunger and thirst in them, set them down to eat and drink, while she told them how she had outwitted the wazir. "We will impale him and burn him at once!" cried the king. "It is permitted," murmured Maruf, and then to his wife, he said: "First, give me back my ring, sweetheart." "I do not think so," answered the princess, "Since you could not keep it when you had it, I will look after it in future." "That is but just," said Maruf.

The impaling stake was set up in the polo ground, opposite the great door of the palace, and the wazir was fitted to it in sight of the whole people. While the instrument was at work, a large fire was lighted below the stake, so that the traitor was both spitted and grilled, like any pigeon. So much for him.

The king shared the government with Maruf and appointed him sole heir to the throne. The ring stayed on the princess's finger, and Maruf lived for some time in pleasurable ease.

But one night, when he had already bade the princess good-night and retired to his own apartment to sleep, an old woman jumped out of his bed and fell upon him with a menacing arm. He had hardly time to recognise her by her terrible jaw, her long teeth, and black ugliness, as Fattumah Hot-Slop, his calamitous wife, before she gave him a couple of sounding blows in the face which broke two more of his teeth. "Where have you been, O wretch?" she cried, "How dared you leave me without farewell? Son of a dog, I have you now!" Maruf turned tail and ran towards the bed-chamber of the princess, his crown awry upon his head and his royal robes flying out behind him. "Help, help!" he shouted, "Help, O Ifrit of the ring!" then darted like a madman into the girl's presence and fell swooning at her feet.

As the princess was sprinkling rose-water upon Maruf's brow to bring him to himself, the terrifying shrew burst in upon them, brandishing a cudgel which she had brought all the way from Egypt. "Where is that son of adultery?" she cried, "Where is that pimp?" At first sight of Fattumah's pitchy cheeks, the princess rubbed the carnelian of the ring and gave a quick order to the Father of Fortune. Instantly the woman was frozen in her place, her arm thrown up, her face tortured with anger, as if she had been held by forty arms.

Maruf came slowly to himself, but, when he saw Hot-Slop's threatening attitude, he swooned again. At once the wise princess knew that she had to do with her husband's former wife, and she gave a further order to the Ifrit, whereby that vixen was lifted from her place and carried into the garden. There she was fastened, as if she had been a wild bear, to the trunk of a stout carob tree, by an enormous chain. And thus she was left, either to mend her manners or to die. So much for her.

Maruf and his wife lived together through many joyful years, until they were visited by the Separator of Friends, the Destroyer, the Tomb Builder, Death the Inevitable.

Glory be to Him who sits throned in eternity above life and death!

And that night, as Shahrazade was not weary and saw that King Shahryar was still disposed to listen, she began this tale of the rich young man who looked out by Windows on the Garden of History.

She said:

WINDOWS ON THE GARDEN OF HISTORY

It is related that there was once a youth in the city of Alexandria, who inherited great possessions and riches from his father in well watered fields and solid buildings. As he was born in benediction, with a right spirit and a knowledge of the Holy Book, which bids a generosity of alms to the people of Allah, he hesitated for a long time as to the best use which he might make of his inheritance. At length, in his perplexity, he decided to consult a venerable sheikh, who had been a friend of his father. He displayed his scruples and hesitations to the old man, who reflected for an hour after hearing them, and then said: "O son of Abderrahman—whom may Allah bless!—to give gold and silver to the needy with full hands is an action which finds great favour in the sight of God. But such merit is possible to any rich man. It is not necessary to have great virtue in order to give away the surplus of one's goods. There is another generosity, the savour of which is more agreeable to the Master of All, and that is the generosity of the intellect. He who can scatter the benefits of his intelligence upon those who grope in darkness, has the highest merit of all in the accounts of heaven. Only a cultivated mind is capable of such an alms, and a cultivated mind is only possible to one who has read and meditated deeply. Enrich your mind, O son of my old friend, and let your alms-giving lie in that direction. Such is my counsel under Allah!"

The rich youth wished to ask for further explanation, but the sheikh would say no more. Therefore he was forced to retire, and inspiration led him to the market of the booksellers. He assembled all the merchants (some of them, indeed, had books belonging to the library which the Christians burnt, when Amru bin Al-As entered Alexandria) and bade them carry to his house all the most precious volumes in their possession. He paid them what they asked, without bargaining or hesitation, but his eagerness was not satisfied. He sent messengers to Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, Persia, Morocco and India, and even among the lands of the Christians, to purchase at any price the best reputed books of all these peoples. When his messengers returned, loaded with bales of precious manuscripts, the young man had these well arranged in the presses of a magnificent dome which he had built for their reception. Above the principal entrance of the place, these simple words were painted in great letters of blue and gold: "The Dome of Books."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-seventy-second Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

THE YOUNG MAN consecrated his days to methodical reading, and, as he had been born under benediction, with his feet pointed towards the way of happiness, he remembered all he read. Soon he was as learned as any sage of his time, and had a mind stored with far greater riches than he had inherited from his father. Then, in order to share this bounty with others, he gave a great feast in the Dome of Books and invited all his friends and acquaintances, his relations far and near, his slaves and his grooms, and the customary beggars upon his threshold. When they had eaten and drunken and thanked Allah, the youth rose in the attentive circle of them, saying: "Oh my guests, let wisdom preside for us tonight instead of music and singing! A wise man has said: 'Bring forth your knowledge that the ear of him who hears may be nourished. He that obtains learning has obtained great riches. God gives wisdom to whom it pleases Him, and intellect is created at His word; but there are few of the sons of men who have been honoured with these things.' Also Allah Himself, speaking by the mouth of His Prophet (upon whom be prayer and peace!) has said: 'O my Faithful, give alms of your best, for he shall not obtain perfection who has not divided that which pleases him most. But give not with ostentation, for the proud giver is like a stony hill covered with a little earth: the rain beats upon that hill and nothing but the naked rock remains. Such men have no profit from their works. But those who give alms for the strengthening of their own souls are like a garden planted upon a hill, which is watered by the abundant rains of heaven and whose fruit hangs double upon the bough. If no rain falls, there shall be dew. And they shall enter into the gardens of Paradise.'

"That is why I have called you together this evening, dear guests. I do not wish to keep the fruits of learning to myself; I desire you to taste them with me, that we may walk together in the way of the spirit."

And he added:

"Let us look out together by the windows of learning upon the garden of history, and watch the marvellous procession of old time pass by, that our souls may be enlightened by that passing and may journey on by that light towards perfection. Amen."

Then all the guests carried their hands to their faces, and replied: "Amen."

The youth sat down amid silence, and thus addressed the circle of his company: "My friends, I do not know how I can better begin than by giving you some particulars of the life of our fathers in the days of chivalry. They were the true Arabs of the sands; their mighty poets could neither read nor write, inspiration was a vehement gift with them, and, without inks or pens or critics, they built up this Arab speech of ours, which Allah chose by preference when He would dictate His words to His Prophet (upon whom be prayer and peace and benediction!). Amen."

When the guests had again replied Amen, "Here is one tale of the thousand tales of chivalry," he said:

THE POET DORAYD, HIS GENEROSITY, AND HIS LOVE FOR TUMADIR AL-KHANSA

THE POET DORAYD bin Simmah, sheikh of the tribe of the Bani-Jusham, lived in the age of chivalry and was equally famous as a warrior and a poet. He was the master of many tents and rich pastures.

One day he set forth on a raid against the rival tribe of the Bani-Firas, whose sheikh was Rabiah, the bravest fighter in all the deserts. As he journeyed at the head of his chosen troop, he came out into a valley belonging to the enemy, and saw, far off at its opposing end, an unmounted man leading a camel ridden by a woman. After the first glance, Dorayd turned to one of his horsemen, saying: "Go forward and fall upon that man!"

The horseman galloped ahead, and, when he had come within shouting distance, cried out: "Leave that woman and run, if you would save your life!" He gave this challenge three times, but the man walked calmly on until the horse was near. Then he passed the camel's halter to the woman, and sang this song:

Ride on in pride, heart ignorant of fear,
Ride on, hips rounded in our tranquil day.
But first, as chance has brought a meeting here,
Enjoy the sword-play of a Firacide. . . .

Now all is safety, lady, now you may
Ride on in pride.

With that he charged Dorayd's warrior, and stretched him lifeless in the dust with a single blow of his lance. He mounted the riderless horse, bowing to the woman as he did so, and led the camel forward again with no sign of haste or emotion.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-seventy-third Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

WHEN DORAYD SAW that his rider did not return, he sent out a second warrior, who found his comrade lying in the path and galloped forward to do battle with the slayer. He cried out his challenge, but the man upon the captured horse seemed not to have heard. He rode towards him with levelled lance, but the man passed the camel's halter to the woman, and suddenly charged, crying:

Although the iron teeth of chance
Drove you, O spew, to take this road
And sicken with your countenance
My lady of the free abode,
The iron of Rabiah's lance
Is fiercer than the teeth of chance!

The warrior fell, pierced through the liver, and died tearing at the sand with his nails. Then Rabiah went forward with unhurried pace.

Dorayd presently became anxious and sent a third rider to look for the other two. The man soon found his comrades lying dead, and perceived a stranger jogging quietly at a little distance, leading a camel by the halter and carelessly trailing his lance. "Yield your prize, O dog of the tribes!" he cried; but Rabiah, without turning, said to his companion: "Dear friend, go forward to our nearest tents." Then he wheeled sharply upon his foe, and chanted:

Have you not seen, O eyeless head,
Your brothers welter in their clots,
And how the Vulture's breathing blots
The scarlet from the cheeks of dread?

Did you hope lessons from my wrath,
Or any teaching from my frowns
Save how a lance-head flourish drowns
Dead kidneys in a crow-black bath?

He pierced Dorayd's third warrior through and through the chest, and his lance broke off short with the violence of that assault; but Rabiah, this fighter of the valleys, knowing himself to be near his tribe, scorned to pick up the weapon of his dead foe. Instead he rode forward, armed only with the splintered shaft.

Astonished that none of his messengers returned, Dorayd himself rode out to look for them, and soon found their lifeless bodies lying at intervals upon the sand. As he went pondering on their death, Rabiah himself came round the side of a little hill and recognised the poet of the Jushamides. Though the sheikh of the Bani-Firas regretted that he had not armed himself from the corpse of his third adversary, yet he halted straight in the saddle, and faced Dorayd with the broken wood of his lance firmly at tilt.

When he saw how ill-equipped Rabiah was for conflict, the grandeur of his soul urged Dorayd to exclaim: "O father of riders, one does not kill such men as you; but my troop is seeking vengeance, and soon it may come upon you, alone, unarmed, and very young. Therefore take this lance of mine, and I will ride back to call off my men from the pursuit."

He galloped to his band, and said to them: "That brave knew how to defend his woman! He killed three of us and disarmed me. He is too strong to be attacked."

Then he bade the warriors follow him back to their own territory, and there was no raid.

Years passed and Rabiah died, as fearless soldiers die, in a bloody engagement with the tribe of Dorayd. To avenge his death a troop of Firacides set out upon a fresh raid against the Bani-Jusham. They fell upon the camp at night, made a great slaughter, and rode off with many captives and a booty of women and goods. Dorayd himself, the sheikh of the Jushamides, walked as one of the prisoners.

When he came among his conquerors, Dorayd was careful to hide his name and quality; but, as he lay under heavy guard, the women of the Firacides were struck by his nobility and walked past him provocatively, triumphing at his discomfiture. "By the black death," cried one of them, "you have done a fair day's work, O children of the Firacides! Do you know this man?" The warriors ran up and examined their captive. "He was one of those who scouted against our band," they said; and the woman answered: "Past question he scouted bravely! This is the man who gave a lance to Rabiah in the valley." She threw her veil over the prisoner as a sign of protection, and cried: "Children of Firas, I claim this captive for myself." So the warriors pressed round the poet, and asked his name. "I am Dorayd bin Simmah," he answered, "but who are you, O lady?" Then said the woman: "I am Rayta, the daughter of Gizl Al-Tian. I rode upon that camel. Rabiah was my husband."

She visited all the tents of her tribe, and said to the horsemen: "Children of Firas, remember the generosity of the son of Simmah, for he gave Rabiah his long and costly lance. Now is the time to return clemency for clemency, lest the mouths of men swell with disgust when they tell the story of Dorayd and the Firacides. You must break his bonds and buy his freedom from the hands of his captor, if you do not wish to raise a stepping-stone to long repentance and regret!"

The Firacides contributed money to pay Muharik, the warrior who had taken Dorayd; and, when he had been set at liberty, Rayta gave the poet the arms of her dead husband.

Dorayd returned to his tribe and never more waged war on the Bani-Firas. Years passed, and he became an old man, though his strength in song was unabated.

Now there dwelt in the tribe of the Bani-Solaïm that Tumadir Al-Khansa, daughter of Amr, who was renowned in all the deserts for her high poetic ecstasy. And one day, as Dorayd rode near the tents of the Solamides, he came upon this girl anointing one of her father's camels with pitch, labouring almost naked because of the heat, and trusting to the loneliness of that place. The poet was able to examine and marvel at her beauty from a hidden vantage, and as he gazed he improvised this song:

Sing to the Solamide,
Sing for this Tumadir,
Make for this light gazelle
Verses of pride!

Unveiled her young bloom,
Never the riding tribes,
Seeking a prodigy,
Found such a camel groom.

Brown girl of high race,
Smooth as an image's
Under the hair stream
Brightens her gold face.

Like the black waves we see
Tailing our stallions
Is the wind-beaten tress.
Let to go carelessly

It floats in glancing chains;
When it is kissed with combs
Then you would call it grapes
Polished by little rains.

Her brows are symmetries
Drawn with a heavy pen,
Black crowns of queenship
Over the deep eyes.

Modelled with leaf shadows,
Her cheeks are scarce flecked,
As by rose purple dawn
Rising on white meadows.

Her lips' red pigment
Lends the small teeth pallor,
Straight jasmin petals
Moistened in honey scent.

And the neck's silver, see,
Balance above breasts
Like the proud breasts on
Girls smoothed in ivory.

Her arms are firm for us,
Firm for me, white for me,
And of her finger-tips
Red dates are envious.

Belly with white valleys
Folded of song paper,
Ranged round the navel's
Deep box of essences!

Where can her waist borrow
Strength for its slenderness,
When to such glory
Falls the slim back furrow?

Mountains of white sands
Drag her to sit on them,
And when she would sit
Swift she again stands.

Yet on two slender
Columns of smoothness,
Stems of papyrus
Sprinkled with tender

Brown hair, two pearl stalks,
Two filed and fine
Feet that are lance blades,
The pride of her walks.

Sing to the Solamide,
Sing for this Tumadir,
Make for this light gazelle
Verses of pride!

Next day the noble Dorayd took the chiefs of his tribe with him and visited Tumadir's father in formal glory, to ask for the hand of his daughter. Old Amr answered the poet readily, saying: "O Dorayd, a man as generous as yourself is not repulsed, so great a chief is never thwarted, so signal a stallion no man would turn from the manger of his desire. But I must tell you that Tumadir has thoughts and angles of her own."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-seventy-fourth Night
Had Come

She said:

"As such thoughts and angles are not common in women, I always let my daughter do as she pleases. I will tell her of your request and use all the persuasion of my tongue, but I cannot answer for her consent, for in that I leave her free." When Dorayd had thanked him, the old man visited Al-Khansa, saying: "O Khansa, a mighty warrior, a man of noble blood, a chief of the Bani-Jusham, one venerated for his bravery and his great age, has come to my tents seeking you in marriage. He is none other than Dorayd, Simmah's noble son, whose warlike odes and ravishing songs you have by heart. The alliance would do us honour, my child, but I shall make no attempt to influence your decision." "Dear father," answered Tumadir, "let me take a few days to consider the matter before I answer."

So Amr returned to Dorayd, saying: "Khansa wishes for a few days in which to consider your proposal, but I have a hope that she will accept your suit. Speak to me again when the time has gone by." "Willingly, O father of heroes," answered Dorayd, and he retired to the tent which had been placed at his disposal.

As soon as the poet had left her father's tent, the fair Solamide called one of her girls to her, saying: "Go out now, and watch Dorayd. Follow him when he leaves the tents to satisfy his need; look carefully at the jet, determine its strength, and bring me news of its track upon the sand. Your report will tell us whether he be still a man or no."

The girl obeyed with such diligence that she was back in a few minutes. "Finished," was her report.

When Dorayd returned for his answer, Amr left him in the men's part of the tent and went to take her answer from Tumadir. "I have considered," she said, "and am determined not to marry out of my tribe. I would not forsake a union with one of my cousins, youths as handsome as great lances, to take this ancient Jushamide, this Dorayd, to my bed. To-morrow, or the day after, he will be gasping out his owl's soul. By the greatness of our warriors, I would rather become an old maid than marry a grey spindle-shanks!"

Though Dorayd was in the other part of the tent, he heard this contemptuous reply and was wounded to the quick. His pride would suffer him to give no sign of his discontent, but, when he returned to his tribe, he answered Tumadir's cruelty with this satire:

Dorayd is old, too old, you say;
(He never claimed he was born yesterday)
While you desire—and, faith, you're right—
A splayfoot clown your senses to delight.
Take my advice, and be afraid
To choose as strong a husband as Dorayd,
For his great strength, when all is said,
Is kept for nobler matters than his bed.
He's one whom, in the throes of fate,
Fear cannot chain nor haste precipitate.
The wretch to whom Dorayd has lent
The shade of his protection or his tent,
Be he the greatest thief unscotched,
Walks in the tribe unquestioned and unwatched.
Even in the hungry months of dearth,
When the new-born go starving from their birth,
His camps are victualled to desire
And many cookpots clatter at his fire.
Again I counsel, be afraid
To take a man, and bear sons, like Dorayd;
For you desire—it is your right—
A splayfoot clown your senses to delight,
And I am old, too old, you say . . .
At least this proves me not born yesterday.

All men advised Tumadir to accept the maker for her husband, but she never went back on her decision.

It was soon after this that Moawiah, Tumadir's brother, a notable warrior, perished in a battle against the hostile tribe of the Murrides. He was slain by the hand of Hashim, the opposing chief, father of that beautiful Asma whom the youth had at one time outraged. It was for her brother that Tumadir made this funeral song, chanted slowly in the tonic of the ring-finger string:

Weep! Weep! Weep!
These tears are for my brother,
Henceforth that veil which lies between us,
That recent earth,
Shall not be lifted again.

You have gone down to the bitter water
Which all must taste,
And you went pure, saying:
"Life is a buzz of hornets about a lance point."

But my heart remembers, O son of my father and
mother,
I wither like Summer grass,
I shut myself in the tent of consternation.

He is dead, who was the buckler of our tribe
And the foundation of our house,
He has departed in calamity.

He is dead, who was the lighthouse of courageous
men,
Who was for the brave
As fires lighted upon the mountains.

He is dead, who rode costly horses,
Shining in his garments.
The hero of the long shoulder belt is dead,
The young man of valiance and beauty breaths no
more;

The right hand of generosity is withered,
And the beardless king of our tribe shall breathe no more.

He shall be cold beneath his rock.

Say to his mare Alwa
That she must weep
As she runs riderless for ever.

O son of Amr,
Glory has galloped with you knee to knee.
When you passed with your brothers to the flame of war
You were as demons riding upon vultures.

You threw your life against the sun,
You sought out unperturbed
Horrors as dark as the tar colour of the storm
And whirlwinds great with steel.

Though you were young like a gold-ringed lance,
Though you were strong and slight
Like a lance-shaft of Rudayna,
Death trailed the hems of her mantle deep in blood
After your feet.

When the red millstone ground the flowers of youth,
You shattered a thousand horses against the squadrons;
High on the groaning flanks of Alwa
You lifted the bright skirts of your silver mail.

You made the lances live,
You shook their beams,
You quenched their beams in red,
O tiger of the double panoply.

White women wandered with disordered veils.
And you saved them in the morning.
Your captives were as troops of antelopes
Whose beauty troubles the first drops of rain.

Your sword was our wall against distress,
How many mothers would have borne no more
If your sword had perished!

How effortless were your rhymes of combat
Chanted in tumult, O my brother!
They pierced like lances,
They live among our hearts for ever.

Let the stars go out,
Let the sun withdraw his rays,
He was our star and sun.

Who now will gather in the strangers at dusk
When the sad North whistles with her winds?
You have laid down and left in the dust, O wanderers,
Him who nourished you with his flocks
And bared his sword for your salvation.
You set him low in the terrible house
Among a few stakes planted,
You threw down boughs of salamah upon him.
He lies among the tombs of our fathers,
Where the days and the years shall pass over him
As they have passed over our fathers.

Your loss is a great distress to me,
Child of the Solamides,
I shall be glad no more.

Tell me, are the meharas comforted
By the little images
When their new-born are taken away?

While you have tears, O daughters of the Solamides,
Weep! Weep! Weep!

It was because of this song that the poet Nabigah Al-Dhobiani and the other poets, assembled at the great fair of Okaz for the annual recitation of their works before all the tribes of Arabia, said of this Tumadir when they were asked of her: "In her verse she surpasses both men and angels!"

Tumadir lived on until after the prediction of Islam in Arabia. In the eighth year of the hegira of Muhamad (upon whom be prayer and peace!) she came with her son Abbas, who had then become paramount chief of the Solamides, to make her submission to the Prophet and to become ennobled in the Faith. Muhamad treated her with honour and, though he had no appreciation of poetry, delighted to hear her say her verses. He even congratulated her on her inspiration and renown.

It was in repeating some of Tumadir's lines that the Prophet showed himself insensitive to the rhythm of prosody. He falsified the quantity of the line he was quoting, by transposing the last two words. The venerable Abu Bekr, who heard this violence done to metrics, would have corrected the mistake, but Muhamad (upon whom be prayer and peace!) answered him: "What does it matter? It is all one." Then said Abu Bekr: "Indeed, O Prophet of Allah, you have fulfilled the word which God revealed to you in His Holy Book: *We have not taught our Prophet the art of verses, for he has no need of this. The Koran* *is a teaching, and the reading of it is a simple reading!"*

But Allah knows all!

Then the young man said to his guests: "Here is another admirable tale from the chivalrous life of our fathers."

And he began:

OFAIRAH THE SUNS, & HOZAYLAH THE MOONS, THE WARRIOR DAUGHTERS OF THE POET FIND

It has come down to us that the poet Find, chief of the Bani-Zimman, which were a branch of the tribe of the Bekrides, who were sprung from Rabiah, had two young daughters, Ofairah the Suns, the elder, and Hozaylah the Moons. When Find was a hundred years old, the whole tribe of the Bekrides went to war with the more numerous Thalabides, and Find, in spite of his great age, was considered worthy, because of his renown, to ride at the head of the seventy horsemen which his tribe sent to the rally of the Bekrides. His two daughters rode with him, and the messenger, who was sent forward to announce his coming, said to the Bekrides: "We of the Bani-Zimman are sending a contingent of a thousand warriors and seventy horsemen." By this he meant that Find was alone equal to an army of a thousand men.

When the fighting tribe of the Bekrides was complete, war was loosed like a hurricane, and a battle took place which is famous even to our time as the Day of Tufts, because the captive Thalabides had their foretops shaven and were then liberated, that all might see the disgrace of their defeat. It was in this engagement that Find's two daughters, the petulant fighters, mistresses of the field, achieved their immortality.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-seventy-fifth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

IN THE HOTTEST hour of the battle, when the issue hung in balance, these two young girls leapt from their horses and began to strip off their garments and coats of mail. When they were quite naked, save for the green anklets and bracelets upon them, one ran forward in the midst of the right wing of the Bekride army, one in the midst of the left wing, and stood there white and panting. In the thick of the fight each improvised a war song, and since then both of these songs have been sung to the rhythm *ramel*, on the tonic of the mean string of the tetracord, alternating with a second rhythm beaten low upon the drum.

This was the war song of Ifairah the Suns:

Red swords, children of Bekr! Red swords!
Heat the battle red, O sons of Zimman!
The heights are drowned in horses,
Heat the battle red!

Put on red robes of honour
And our arms shall be white for you,
Lay on red swords this morning, sons of Bekr!

Let your wounds be wide as the rent garment
Of a mad mistress,
And we will prepare our bodies for you
On soft cushions.
Let your swords be red!

Red swords, red roses, sons of Bekr!
Chilren of Zimman, heat the battle red!

Hozaylah the Moons stayed by her father, who had cut the hamstrings of his camel in the van of the left wing, so that he might not at all retreat. This was the war song of her anger, to exalt those who ringed the standard of her tribe:

Carve all, carve all, O children of Zimman,
Carve with your cutting swords!
Shake down the red thunderbolts,
O sons of Bekr!

We are the daughters of the morning star
Nard-haired,
Pearls are about us. . . .
Shake down the red thunderbolts, O riders,
And we are yours!

Mow us a red carpet for our feet,
O riders of Rabiah!
Hozaylah of Moons is for the reddest sword!

This double chant of death heated a new ardour in the veins of the Bekrides, the slaughter waxed, and victory came to rest with them.

That is how our fathers fought in the days of chivalry. That was the fashion of their daughters. May the fires of Hell lie not too sore upon them!

Then the rich youth said to his stirred guests: "Now listen to the love story of the Princess Fatima with the poet Murakish, who both lived also in that heroic age."

And he began:

THE LOVE STORY OF PRINCESS FATIMA & THE POET MURAKISH

It is related that Neman, King of Hirah in Irak, had a daughter named Fatima, who was as ardent as she was beautiful. Knowing the young princess's dangerous temperament, her father kept her shut up in a remote palace, as a precaution against calamity, and had the approaches guarded day and night by armed men, both to do his daughter honour and to preserve that quality in her. None but Fatima's personal servant had the right of entry into this stronghold of virtue; and, that assurance might be doubly sure, the guards had orders to trail large woollen garments all about the sand at evening, so that the handmaid's little footprints might disappear and a surface be left for the detection of any larger ones.

The beautiful captive would often climb up to the top of her cloister, and sigh as she gazed upon the men walking far off. One day, while she was thus engaged, she saw her servant, whose name was Ibnat-Ijlan, talking to a youth of most attractive appearance. When she questioned the girl, she discovered that this was none other than the celebrated poet Murakish, and that much joy of love had passed between the two. Ibnat, who was both charming and vivacious, boasted to her mistress of her lover's beauty and the great wealth of his falling hair, until Fatima burned to see for herself, and to share the favours of this prodigy. Yet, because she was a princess of refined delicacy, she would do nothing in the matter until she was sure that the poet had some pretension to noble birth. This is an example of that breeding which guided each action of the Arab nobility in those days. Contrast it with the careless acceptance of the less scrupulous handmaid.

In order to prove the poet, Fatima talked with Ibnat-Ijlan concerning her chance of introducing him into the palace, and ended by saying: "When he is with you tomorrow, give him a toothpick of scented wood and a brazier with a little perfume burning in it. If he uses the toothpick without snipping it and fraying the end, or if he places the brazier under his garments and gets right over it, he will have proved himself a man of humble origin. As such he would be unworthy of a princess, even were he the greatest poet alive."

Next morning, when the handmaid went to find her lover, she set a brazier in the middle of the chamber where they met, and, after throwing grains of perfume upon it, bade the poet come near and scent himself. But, instead of moving, he answered: "Bring it here to me." When Ibnat had done so, he scented his beard and hair only, making no movement to set the brazier below his clothes. Then he accepted the toothpick which his mistress gave him and, after cutting off a portion of it, frayed out the end into a small flexible brush, with which he rubbed his teeth and perfumed his gums.

When the act of kind had taken place between these two, the little one returned to her petulant mistress and reported the result of the double test. "Bring this noble Arab to me instantly!" cried Fatima.

But the guards were armed and watchful, and every morning the king's diviners came to scrutinise the footprints left upon the sand. "O king of time," they would say to Neman on their return, "we could only read the passing of the little feet of the girl Ibnat-Ijlan."

What did that astute handmaid do to achieve the introduction of Murakish? On the night appointed she took the young man strongly upon her back, fastened a mantle about both of them in order to secure him, and carried him thus safely into the presence of the princess. The poet passed a white night of benediction, a night of sweetness and flame in the arms of that vehement king's daughter. Then he departed at dawn as he had come, on the back of the handmaid.

In the morning what happened? The king's diviners examined the sand about the palace, and then reported to King Neman: "O king of time, we could only read the passing of the little feet of the girl Ibnat-Ijlan, but she must be putting on weight at the palace, for her footprints are becoming noticeably deeper."

By this ruse the princess and the poet loved each other in all delight for many weeks, and the diviners continued to talk of the fattening effect of life in the palace. This joy might never have known a period, had not Murakish pulled down his happiness with his own hands.

He had a friend, so dear that he could refuse him nothing, and, when this friend learnt of the princess's love making, nothing would satisfy him but that he should go, trusting to the darkness, to take the poet's place. At length Murakish was persuaded and gave his oath. So, that night, it was the friend who climbed on the handmaid's back and was carried to the bed of Fatima.

In the obscurity, that began which was fated to begin and Murakish's friend was beginning to be well satisfied with his destiny, when the expert princess discovered the substitution. She leapt from the bed in great haste and beat the intruder about his face. Then, kicking him with the disdainful scorn with which one kicks a mongrel cur, she had Ibnat-Ijlan carry him away upon her shoulders.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-seventy-sixth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

AFTER THAT, FATIMA would never allow the poet to come near her, or for one moment forgive his betrayal of their love. This was a song he wrote:

Farewell Fatima, Neman's daughter
With a cadenced ostrich walk
And a waist of nabk stalk,
Teeth wet with the mouth's dew water.
Farewell fairness, a pool water,
Farewell Neman's daughter.

Farewell cheeks of surface silver,
Golden wrists with copper bangles,
Lake hair lying in black angles

Deep to drain my heart's bright river.
Farewell glorying glittering river,
Farewell surface silver.

Dreams are the pictures in the book of sleep
And no more mine for ever.

The poet Murakish was one of those lovers who died for love.

Then said the young man to his guests: "Before we come to the time of Islam, listen to this tale of the king of the Kindites and his wife Hind."

And he began:

THE VENGEANCE OF KING HOJJR

It is handed down in the annals of our fathers that King Hojjr, chief of the Kindite tribes and father of that Imru Al-Kays who was the greatest poet of chivalry, had renown among the Arabs for his ferocity and signal boldness. He was so harsh with his family that his son, Prince Imru, had to flee the paternal tents, before he could give rein to his genius, for King Hojjr considered that a public assumption of the poetic title was a derogation from nobility.

Once, when the king was far from his own territory on a warlike expedition against the dissenting tribe of the Bani-Assad, his ancient enemies the Kodaydes, with Ziad at their head, raided his home lands and made off with a large booty of dried dates, horses, camels, oxen, and young girls. And Hind, the jewel of the tribe, the king's favorite wife, was among the captives.

As soon as the news of this disaster reached Hojjr, he hastened back with all his warriors and made for a spot where he might hope to come up with his foe. When he was within a short distance of the camp of the Kodaydes, he sent two proven spies, Salih and Sadus, to collect information concerning the strength and movement of Ziad's band.

The two spies succeeded in entering the hostile camp, and there collected many invaluable particulars of the enemy's number and disposition. After a few hours of close research, Salih said to his companion: "I think that we have gathered enough to outline Ziad's plans to our master. I intend to return with my news." But Sadus answered: "I will not return without more detailed information." And he stayed on alone in the camp of the Kodaydes.

At nightfall a detachment of Ziad's men posted themselves on guard round their chief's tent, and Sadus was in peril of discovery; therefore he took a bold course and brought his hand down heavily on the shoulder of one of the guards, asking in a tone of sharp command: "Who are you?" "Such and such, son of such and such," answered the man. "Good!" cried Sadus, and he sat down right against the tent, sure now that none would care to disturb him.

At once he heard voices talking within, the voices of Ziad and Hind as they kissed and played together. Among other matters Sadus marked the following dialogue: the voice of Ziad said: "Tell me what your husband Hojjr would do, if he knew that we were occupied so sweetly?" "By death," answered Hind, "he would run upon your track like a wolf, he would never stay till he came to your red tents. He would rage and thirst for vengeance, he would scatter foam from his mouth, as a rutting camel which has eaten bitter herbs." Ziad was jealous at this answer and gave his captive a buffet in the face, saying: "I understand! That bald ape pleases you, you love him, and wish to humiliate me!" But Hind vehemently denied this accusation. "I swear by Lat and Ozzat," she cried, "that I have never loathed a man as I loathe my husband. But, at the same time, I must warn you that I have never known a man, sleeping or waking, more vigilant and circumspect." "How is that?" asked Ziad, and Hind continued: "Hojjr sleeps with one eye open and with half of his mind awake. I will give you an example: one night, as he slept by my side and I watched over his sleep, a black snake came from below the mat and made straight as if to crawl over his face. Without waking Hojjr turned his head away. Then the snake crawled towards the open palm of his hand. Hojjr closed his hand. The snake went down towards his stretched foot, but Hojjr bent his leg in his sleep and pulled his foot away. Disturbed by these movements, the snake made for a pitcher of milk which the king had always by his bed. It swallowed greedily and then vomited back the milk into the jar, while I rejoiced in my soul, saying: 'When he wakes, he will drink the poisoned milk and then die. I shall be free from this wolf for ever.' Soon Hojjr woke in a great thirst and lifted the pitcher; but, before he drank, he sniffed at the milk, his hand trembled, the pitcher dropped, and he was saved. He is like this in all things; he thinks of everything, foresees everything, and never can be taken unawares."

As the spy heard nothing after this save the noise of sighs and kisses, he rose softly and left the camp. By hastening his steps he reached his master before the dawn, and told him what he had seen and heard. "When I left them," he said, "Ziad had his head upon the knees of Hind; he was playing with her and she was answering."

A grating sigh rumbled in the breast of Hojjr at this news, and he ordered an immediate attack to be made upon the Kodayde camp.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-seventy-seventh Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

THE FULL FORCE of the Kindites fell upon the followers of Ziad, who were worsted in that furious engagement and put to flight. Their tents were sacked and burnt. Many were slain and much was driven down the wind of anger.

Hojjr found Ziad in the mass, attempting to rally the retreat; with a bellow of rage he stooped from his horse and lifted his rival high in air. He held him thus suspended for a breath by the strength of his wrists, and then dashed him to the earth, so that his bones were broken. He cut off Ziad's head and fastened it to the tail of his warhorse.

As soon as this part of his vengeance had been satisfied, he sought for Hind until he found her. He bound her between two horses and lashed them in opposite directions; as she was torn in sunder, he cried: "Your tongue was sweet, the secrets of your heart were bitter!"

When he had told them of this wild revenge, the young man said to his guests: "Since I am still dealing with the time before the benediction of Islam, I will tell you a tale to illustrate the thoughts of Arab women at that period. It is reported by our Lady Aishah, the cherished wife of the Prophet (upon whom be prayer and peace!). She was the fairest and most noble woman of primitive Islam; she was tender, courageous, passionate, and wise; her brilliant speech had male vigour combined with the wholesome eloquence of a young girl.

Then the young man described in the very words of Aishah:

MEN IN THE JUDGMENT OF THEIR WIVES

One day certain noble women of Yemen met at my house and agreed on oath to tell the whole truth concerning their husbands, without dissimulation whether for good or evil.

The first said: "My husband, is it? An ugly and inaccessible man, as it were camel meat perched on a difficult mountain. And so dry with it all, that there is not a morsel of marrow to be found in him. A worn straw mat!"

The second said: "Even to speak of mine is sickening to me. An intractable brute, he threatens divorce if I answer him one word; and, if I keep silence, he bustles me until I feel as if I were balanced on a naked lance point."

Then said the third: "Here is a description of my charming lord: if he eats he licks the bottoms of the plates, if he drinks he sucks out the last drop, if he stoops he squats like a parcel, if he kills for our food it is ever the dryest and leanest of the flock. Otherwise he is nothing; even his hand does not touch me to find out how I do."

The fourth said: "Be it far off from me! He is a heavy burden upon my eyes and upon my heart, both day and night. He is a storehouse of defects, extravagances, idiocies. He will give you a slap over the side of the head as soon as look at you, or prick and tear your belly, or rush at you, or slap and tear and rush at the same time. A dangerous animal, Allah destroy him!''

But the fifth said: ''My man is both good and pleasant, like the fairest of the nights of Tihamah; he is generous as the rain, he is honoured and feared by all our warriors. He is a lion going forth in his magnificence. His heart burns for all men; the column of his name is high and glorious. He hoards his hunger even at feast times; he watches in the night of danger. He has built his house near the public square so that it shall be the first resort of every traveller. Oh, he is great and handsome! His skin is a soft rabbit silk, it tickles me deliciously. The perfume of his breath is the scent of the zarnab; yet, in spite of all these things, I do as I like with him.''

The sixth lady of Yemen smiled sweetly, as she said: ''My husband is Malik Abu-Zar, that Abu-Zar whom the tribes love. He found me the child of a poor house, he led me to his tent of colours, and enriched my ears with rings of splendour; he put ornaments upon my breasts, and his love brought fatness to my wasted arms. He honoured me as his bride, he led me to a dwelling filled with the singing of lively songs and the shining of the lances of Samhar. Ever in my ears I hear the noises of horses, and of camels collected in great parks, the noise of milling and threshing, the noise of twenty flocks. With him I speak to my desire and he does not check me. When I lie down he does not leave me dry, and when I sleep he lets me sleep on. He has quickened my flanks with an excellent little son, so small that his bed seems a sliver of reed plucked from the mat, so behaved that the ration of a new-born kid suffices him, so delightful that when he walks, balancing in his little coat of mail, he drags after him the hearts of all beholders. And the daughter which Abu-Zar gave me! The delicacy, the jewel of our tribe! Her plumpness exquisitely fills her garment, she is bound in her small mantle like a tress of hair. Her belly is firm and straight, the line of her body is a pleasure under her coat, her thighs are rich and free, her little arms are rounded. She has a wide and open eye, a deep black eye with brows of gentle arch. Her nose is curved a little, the blade of a costly sabre. Fair and sincere is her mouth, beautiful and generous are her hands, her gaiety flashes in freedom. Her speech refreshes like a shadow at noonday, her breath is softer than silk, a soul-ensnaring musk. May Allah keep them for my tenderness and joy, the daughter of Abu-Zar, the son of Abu-Zar, and Abu-Zar!"

When the sixth had thus spoken, I thanked all my guests for the pleasure they had given me, and then, taking up the discourse, said:

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-seventy-eighth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

"MY SISTERS, MAY Allah in the highest preserve the Prophet for our blessing! My mouth is not pure enough to sing his praise; I will content myself with repeating words of his concerning us, we women who are for the most part fuel for the fires of Hell.

One day I begged him to give me counsel which should lead me into the path of righteousness, and he said to me:

"'O Aishah of my heart, let the women of the Mussulmans keep watch upon themselves, to have patience in adversity and to be not unmindful in the day of their fortune, to give many children to their husbands, to surround their husbands with honour and attention, and never to be ungrateful for the gifts of Allah. For God shall drive out from His mercy the ungrateful woman. Also that woman who looks with an insolent regard upon her husband, saying to him or concerning him: "An ugly face! A hideous body!" God will twist out one of her eyes in the Day of Judgment, He will lengthen and deform her body, He will cause it to know an ignoble heaviness, to be a repulsive mass of flaccid flesh, dirtily lumped upon a rumpled, hanging base. Also the woman who opposes her husband in the marriage bed, or vexes him with bitter words, or profanes his mood, Allah shall pull forth her tongue upon the last day into a foul and fleshy thong, sixty cubits in length, which shall wind its horrible, livid meat about her neck.

"'But the virtuous woman, who never troubles the peace of her husband, who never stays from the house at night without permission, who despises dear-bought garments and precious veils, who wears no costly circles about her arms and ankles, who does not angle for the glances of Believers, who is content with the natural beauty God has given her, whose words are soft, whose riches lie in works of charity, who eagerly foresees in all that concerns her husband, who has a tender love for her children, who keeps good counsel for her neighbour, and who is well disposed to each creature of Allah—that woman, my dear Aishah, shall enter into Paradise with the prophets and the chosen of the Lord!'

"Then I was moved to cry: 'O Prophet of Allah, you are dearer to me than the blood of my father and mother!'"

"And now," continued the young man, "that we have reached the time of the benediction of Islam, let us consider certain aspects of the life of the khalifat Omar Ibn Al-Khatab (whom may Allah bless!). In an age which was stern and pure he was the purest and the sternest; he was the most upright of all Commanders of the Faithful."

And he told:

TALES OF OMAR THE SEPARATOR

It is related that the Commander of the Faithful, Omar Ibn Al-Khatab, the most upright khalifat and disinterested servant of Islam, was also called Al-Farrukh, or the Separator, because it was his custom to cut in two with his sword any man who refused to bow to sentence pronounced against him by the Prophet (upon whom be prayer and peace!).

His unworldly simplicity was such that, when he had made himself master of the treasures of the kings of Yemen, he distributed all this booty equally among the Mussulmans, without making distinction of any. Among other things, each received a portion of striped cloth, and Omar had his portion made into a new garment. He was dressed in this garment when he went up into the pulpit at Medina and harangued his hearers to a new raid against the Infidels. As he was speaking, a man of the congregation rose and interrupted him, saying: "We will not obey you." "Why so" asked Omar. "Because," answered the man, "when you divided the striped cloth of Yemen you said that each should have an equal share, but now we see you in a new garment which would have taken more than one man's share to make, for you are very tall. We will not obey you, because you have taken more than your share of the striped cloth." Omar turned to his son Abdalla, saying: "Answer this man, for his complaint is just." So Abdalla rose, and cried: "O Mussulmans, when the Commander of the Faithful wished to have a garment sewn of his share of the cloth and it was found insufficient, I gave him a portion of mine, for I knew that otherwise he would have no suitable dress in which to preach before you today." Then he sat down, and the interrupter exclaimed: "Glory be to Allah! Omar, we will obey you!"

On another occasion, when Omar had conquered Syria, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Persia, and all the lands of the Roums, and had founded Bassora and Kufa in Irak, he returned to Medina in a robe so tattered that it hung in twelve pieces, and sat all day upon the steps leading up to the mosque, listening to the complaints of the humblest and weighing out equal justice to emir and camel-boy.

Now Cæsar Heraklios, who ruled the Christians at Constantinople, had sent an ambassador with secret instructions to report the means, the strength, and the behaviour of the Arab prince. When this man arrived in Medina, he asked: "Where is your king?" and the people answered: "We have no king, for we have a prince! He is the Prince of Believers, Omar

Ibn Al-Khatab, the khalifat of Allah!" "Where is he" asked the ambassador, "Lead me to him." "He does justice, or he sleeps," they answered, as they pointed out the road to the mosque.

So Cæsar's ambassador walked to the mosque and saw Omar sleeping in the noonday sun on the hot steps of the temple, with his head lying directly upon the stone. The sweat fell from the sleeper's brow and made a pool of moisture about his head.

Fear descended upon the heart of Cæsar's ambassador, and he could not help but cry: "All the kings of the earth have bowed their heads before this beggar; he is the master of the world's great empire. When a people is governed by such a man, other nations must put on mourning."

During the conquests of Persia, many objects of marvel were taken from the palace of King Jezdejerd at Istakar, and among them was a carpet, sixty cubits square, which pictured a garden whose every flower was made of precious stones and rose from a stalk of pure gold. Though Saad bin Abu-Wakas, the Mussulman general, had no practice in estimating the value of precious furnishings, he understood that here was a thing of price, and saved it from the looting of the palace as a present for Omar. But the upright khalifat (whom may Allah be pleased to favour!) feared, if he accepted such a gift, to encourage that luxury which he had always dreaded for his people. (You will remember that, after the subjection of Yemen, he would touch nothing but a share of coarse striped cloth). So, as soon as he received the carpet, he had it cut into as many pieces as there were chiefs in Medina, and refused even one portion for himself. Though its value was depreciated by such treatment, the materials of the carpet were so costly that Ali (upon whom be prayer and peace!) was able to sell his small square to the Syrian merchants for twenty thousand dirhams.

In this invasion of Persia, the satrap Harmozan was one of the last to surrender and only gave himself up at length on the understanding that the khalifat himself should decide his fate. Omar was at Medina, and thither Harmozan was conducted by two of the most courageous of our emirs. These good men wished the khalifat to understand the importance and high rank of their prisoner, so they allowed him to resume his gold embroidered mantle and tall, bright tiara, which were such as the satraps used to wear at the Persian court. When Harmozan appeared before the steps of the mosque thus nobly clad, he refused to believe that the figure sitting in rags and alone upon an old mat in the courtyard could be the Commander of the Faithful; and the khalifat, for his part, when he raised his eyes at the rumour that some personage approached, and saw before him a prisoner dressed in those proud trappings which had so long overawed the noblest Arab tribes, cried in a great voice: "Glory be to Allah who has raised up Islam to humble you, and such as you!" He had the Persian stripped of his gilded robe and muffled in a coarse blanketing of the desert; then he said: "Now that you are clad according to your deserts, do you acknowledge the hand of that Lord to whom alone is grandeur?" "I easily recognise His hand in this," answered Harmozan, "If God had remained neutral, I know that we would have vanquished you; our past triumphs and greater glory tell me so. This Lord must have fought on your side, since you conquered us." Hearing this confession of faith and finding it somewhat too ironical, Omar frowned so fiercely that the Persian was stricken by a sudden foreboding. Dreading that his conversation might have earned him death, he feigned a violent thirst and asked for water; when an earthen jar was handed to him, he fixed his eyes on the khalifat and seemed to hesitate. "Of what are you afraid?" asked Omar.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-seventy-ninth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

"I FEAR THAT SOMEONE will stab me while I am occupied in drinking," answered the satrap; but Omar said: "Allah preserve me from such a suspicion! I at least grant you grace until this water has cooled your lips and quenched your thirst." At once the subtle Persian threw the jar upon the steps and shattered it. Omar felt bound by his oath to harry the man no more, and, touched by such generosity, Harmozan ennobled himself in Islam. Thenceforward he received from Omar a pension of two thousand dirhams.

At the time of the taking of Jerusalem, the city sacred to Jesus, son of Mary, the greatest prophet before the coming of Muhamad (upon whom be prayer and peace!) the city towards which the primitive Believers turned in prayer, the patriarch Sophronios consented to surrender if the khalifat in person would come to take possession of the holy place. Hearing of this condition, Omar set out from Medina; though he was Allah's khalifat upon earth, though he had bowed the heads of kings before the standard of Islam, he went alone. The camel upon which he rode bore two sacks, one of fodder for itself and another of dates. With a wooden platter slung before him and a waterskin behind, the Commander of the Faithful went forward day and night, stopping only for prayer or to deliver justice to some chance-met tribe, until he came to the gates of Jerusalem. He signed the treaty of capitulation, and the city was opened to him. As he passed the Christian church, he perceived that the time of prayer was at hand, and asked Sophronios in what place he might humble himself before Allah. The Christian suggested the church, but Omar refused, saying: "Though your faith is false, I will not pray in your church, for, when the khalifat prays upon any spot, the Mussulmans take it at once into their possession." After he had humbled himself towards the holy Kaaba, he said to the patriarch: "Now show me some spot where I may build a mosque, that the Mussulmans may assemble for prayer without troubling you in the exercise of your devotions." Sophronios led him to the site of the temple of Sulayman, in that place where Jacob, the son of Abraham, once laid his head. Seeing that the stone of Jacob served as a receptacle for all the filth of the city, Omar lifted some of the dung, as an example to the workmen, and bore it away in the folds of his garment. Thus it was that he cleared the place of that mosque which is the fairest upon earth and bears his name.

Omar used to walk through the markets and streets of Mecca and Medina, leaning on a stick and dressed in rags. This he did in order to detect those merchants who cheated or overcharged; sometimes he would sternly lecture the delinquent and sometimes, if the case were bad, beat him severely with the stick.

One day, as he passed through the milk and curd market, he saw an old woman who had jars of milk for sale. When he had watched her doings for some time, he went up to her, saying: "O woman, be very careful never again to cheat the Faithful as I have seen you cheating; be very careful never again to put water in your milk." "I hear and I obey, O Prince of Believers," answered the woman, and Omar went upon his way. But next morning he approached the milk seller again, saying: "Daughter of evil, did I not warn you not to put water in your milk?" "I swear I have not done so, O Commander of the Faithful," cried the old woman; but a girl's voice came angrily from the interior of the shop, saying: "Mother, how dare you lie to the Prince of Believers? How dare you add untruth to fraud, and disrespect to both? May Allah pardon you!"

Omar's heart was moved by these words. Instead of reproaching the old woman further, he turned to his two sons, Abdalla and Akim, saying: "Which of you wishes to marry this virtuous maiden? It is certain that Allah will grant the child, by the perfumed bestowal of His grace, a posterity as virtuous as herself." "I will marry her, my father," answered Akim, who was Omar's younger son. Thus it was that a marriage took place between a milkseller's daughter and a khalifat's son; and that marriage was blessed, for the daughter of it married Abd Al-Aziz bin Marwan and bore Omar bin Abd Al-Aziz. He ascended the throne of the Ommiades, being the eighth of that dynasty, and was one of the five great khalifats of Islam. Glory be to Him who raises to honour!

Omar used to say: "I will never let the murder of a Mussulman go unavenged." One day, while he sat in judgment on the steps of the mosque, they brought him the murdered body of a beardless boy, tender and girlish, saying that they had found it in the road.

Omar investigated the crime with zeal, but could come upon no clue to the murderer. His unsuccess weighed on his justice-loving soul, and he would often be heard to pray: "O our Lord Allah, grant that I may run the man to earth."

At the beginning of the next year, a living new-born child was brought to him who had been found abandoned on the place where the boy's body had been thrown down. "Glory be to Allah!" cried Omar, "Now am I master of the victim's blood, and the murder shall not go unavenged."

He handed over the child to a woman in whom he had confidence, saying: "Look after this poor orphan at my expense. Never let him be taken away from you, and listen very carefully to all that any person may say concerning him. If you notice that some woman kisses the infant and clasps him to her breast, find out discreetly where she lives and inform me at once." The nurse took the child, and laid the khalifat's instructions in the heart of her memory.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-eightieth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

THE CHILD GREW sturdily, and, when he was two years old, a slave came one day to the nurse, saying: "My mistress begs you to allow me to take your little son to her. She is pregnant and, because your child is beautiful—Allah preserve him from the evil eye!—wishes to look upon him for a short time, that the life in her womb may be moulded to resemble him." "It is permitted, but I must accompany you," answered the nurse.

They set forth together, and, as soon as the slave's mistress saw the boy, she ran to him weeping and took him in her arms, covering him with kisses and rocking over him.

The nurse hastened to the khalifat with this news. "And the woman" she said, "is none other than that most virtuous Saleha, daughter of the venerable Ansarite, the sheikh Saleh, who knew and followed our master the Prophet (upon whom be prayer and peace!)."

After reflection Omar concealed a sword under his mantle and sought out the house of the Ansarite, whom he found sitting in meditation before his door. "What has your daughter done, O venerable sheikh?" he asked after greeting; and the sheikh replied: "O Commander of the Faithful, may Allah reward her for her works of charity! She is known far and wide for her exemplary conduct and her piety, for her deep sense of duty towards Allah and her father, for her zeal in prayer and all religious observance, for the purity of her faith." "That is well," said Omar, "but I wish to see her, in order that I may increase in her, even, the love of good.'' ''Allah pour His blessings upon you, O Prince of Believers!'' answered Saleh, ''May he reward your benevolence towards my daughter! If you will stay here till my return, I will go and warn Saleha to expect you.''

When he was introduced into the girl's presence, Omar ordered all who were there to depart and leave him quite alone with her. Then, uncovering his sword, he said: ''I wish to hear your theory concerning the death of the boy who was found in the road, for I know you have a theory. If you try to hide the truth from me, there is this sword between us, O Saleha.'' ''Commander of the Faithful,'' answered the girl calmly, ''your investigations have led you to the right quarter. I swear, by the great name of Allah and by the virtues of His blessed Prophet (upon whom be prayer and peace!) that I will tell you the whole truth.'' Then she lowered her voice, and said:

''I had an old woman to live with me, and she went with me everywhere. I loved her as if I had been her daughter, and she was devoted to my service. We were together for a long time in mutual care, and I listened to her every word with veneration.

''One day she came to me, saying: 'My child, I must go for a short time to my kinsfolk. But I have a daughter, and I fear that, in the house where now she stays, she may be exposed to some irrevocable disaster. I pray you to let me bring her here and leave her in your charge, until I return.' When I had given permission, she went upon her visit.

''Next morning the daughter came to my house, and I found her both tall and beautiful. I grew fond of her, and let her sleep in the room where I myself slept.

''One afternoon I rested upon my bed and felt myself assaulted in my sleep. I was being ravished by some man who lay upon me with all his weight and held me helpless. When I could free myself, I was already soiled and dishonoured. In my agony of shame, I seized a knife and plunged it into the belly of my assailant, a beardless youth who had entered my household in disguise, feigning to be the old woman's daughter.

"When I had killed him, I had the body thrown down in the place where it was found. Allah permitted that I should become with child by that rape, but, when I bore a son, I abandoned him in the spot where his father's corpse had lain, for I would not raise a son who had been gotten upon me by force. That is the story of those two, O Prince of Believers. Allah is my witness that I have told you the truth!"

"You have told me the truth, my daughter!" cried Omar, "May Allah shower down His blessings upon you!" In great admiration for the virtue and courage of the girl, he recommended her to persevere in her pious works, and also prayed for her. As he passed out of the house, he said to her father: "May Allah bless your house, my friend, because of the virtue of your daughter! I have exhorted her as far as in me lies, and will trouble her no further." "May Allah lead you in the way of all content, O Commander of the Faithful," answered the unsuspecting Ansarite, "may He bestow such blessings as your soul desires!"

After a short rest, the rich young man continued: "I will now tell you quite a different tale, the tale of Blue Sallamah the Singer."

And he said:

BLUE SALLAMAH THE SINGER

Muhamad of Kufa, the poet, singer, and musician, tells the story thus:

Of all the girls and slaves to whom I gave music and singing lessons, Blue Sallamah was my most beautiful and vivacious pupil, my most fascinating, witty, and most promising. We called this brown child Blue because she bore on her upper lip a blue trace of dainty hair, as if the light hand of an illuminator had rubbed a morsel of musk upon it. At the time when I taught her she was quite young, a maiden on the eve of flower time, with little breasts just large enough to make a rising and falling in her garment. To look at her was ravishment, a disturbance of the soul, the eyes were dazzled, and the brain reeled. Though all the renowned beauties of Kufa were in her company, no man had eyes for any but Sallamah. "See, see, the Blue!" we would exclaim when she appeared. She was passionately and vainly loved by all who knew her; I loved her to distraction. Though she was my pupil, I was her devoted and obedient slave; if she had asked me for a human fry of brains and marrow, I would have rummaged all the gallows' heads and mossy bones of the world.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-Hundred-and-eighty-first Night
Had Come

She said:

When her master, Ibn Ghanim, went on pilgrimage and took her with him among his other slaves, I composed the words and music of this song:

O Ghanim, you have left behind your caravan
A lifeless lover but a living man.
With bitter-apple and wormwood you have undone
Such love as has not often seen the sun,
And you allowed your camel-boy to break my heart
When with a grin he drove two souls apart.

But my case was not as dark as that of another of Blue's lovers, Yezid bin Auf, the money-changer.

One day Ibn Ghanim took it into his head to say: "O Blue, did any of all those who have fruitlessly loved you, ever obtain a secret meeting or a kiss? Tell me the truth!" Fearing that her lord had become aware of some little license which she had allowed herself before indiscreet witnesses, Sallamah answered truthfully: "No one has ever had anything from me except Yezid bin Auf, the money-changer, who took a single kiss. I should never have given it to him, if he had not slipped two magnificent pearls into my mouth by way of exchange. I sold them afterwards for eighty thousand dirhams."

"Was that so?" said Ibn Ghanim, and, without a word to show the jealous hatred that he felt, he settled down on the trail of Yezid bin Auf. He followed him until a suitable occasion offered, and then had him beaten to death.

These were the circumstances of that fatal kiss:

As I was going one day towards Ibn Ghanim's house to give Blue Sallamah a singing lesson, I met Yezid bin Auf in the street and asked him: "Whither away, O Yezid, in such brave garments?" "We are bound for the same place," he answered, and I said: "Then let us go together."

We were shown into the guest chamber, and Sallamah came to us there, dressed in an orange mantle and a rose red kaftan so that she seemed one stormy sun from head to foot. A slave girl followed, carrying a lute.

While Blue was singing in a new mode which I had taught her, while her voice rang rich and deep and moving in our ears, her master left us to give orders for the midday meal. Then Yezid, whose heart was burning for the singer, went nearer to her, begging for a look. Though she did not break off her song, her answering glance so intoxicated the changer that he drew two unparalleled pearls from his belt, and said, waiting until the song was over: "O Blue, I have just paid sixty thousand dirhams for these pearls. If they take your fancy, they are yours." "What must I do to please you?" she asked, and he answered: "Sing for me."

So Sallamah carried her hand to her brow in acquiescence, and sang a trifle whose words and music she had made herself:

The aching wound in my heart is red
Although Blue Sallamah made it.
I showed my wound, and the doctors said
Nothing on earth could aid it;
So I took my wound to love, instead,
But he only looked wise and shook his head.
"I can do nothing for that," he said,
"I suppose Blue Sallamah made it?"

She sang this, looking at Yezid, and then said: "Now give me what you have to give." "Your will is mine," he answered, "but I have sworn an oath, a sacred oath, that I will only pass the pearls from my lips to yours." The slave rose in indignation to admonish the audacious lover, but I caught her by the arm, saying: "Let them be, my girl! Matters are in fine train and they are both bound for great profit with little loss."

Sallamah laughed, and said: "So be it! You may give them in any way you please."

Yezid placed the pearls between his lips and then approached Sallamah on hands and knees, as if he had been a dog; she fled from him to right and left, with her robes held up, uttering frightened little cries. But, when she had nearly worn him out with this pretty game and had maddened him with the thousand coquetries of her retreat, she made a sign to her slave, who caught the changer by the shoulders and pinioned him in his place. Having proved herself the victor, Blue Sallamah went forward, in a little confusion, her brow diamonded from sweat, and kissed the pearls from the lover's lips to her own. Then she recovered countenance, and cried with a laugh: "See, you are beaten all along the line, O Yezid!" "That does not trouble me," answered Yezid, "I have caught a delight of perfumes from your lips which will stay in my heart for ever."

Allah have Yezid bin Auf in His compassion! He died for love.

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"And now you shall hear an example of Tofaylism," said the rich young man. "The word was coined by our fathers, who lived in the age of Tofayl the Glutton, to express the habit of going to feasts as an uninvited guest."

And he told:

THE TALE OF THE PARASITE

It is related that the khalifat Al-Walid, son of Yezid, of the dynasty of Omar, greatly rejoiced to sit with Tofayl of the Feasts, the lover of good dishes and fine flavours, the famous voluptuary who gave his name to the profession of parasite. Apart from his deep knowledge of foods, this Tofayl had a learned wit, a cynical malice, and was ever ready with an apposite retort. His mother, by the way, had been taken in adultery. He expressed the whole art and shamelessness of sponging in these lines:

He who's invited to a wedding feast
Must look about as if he felt no least
  Shade of uncertainty,
Must enter jauntily and take the best
Seat, catching no one's eye, that every guest
  May think him quality;
Must quell the porter if he will not quail,
Must scorn the dishes as but poor regale
  For such a man as he,
Yet clutch the wine jars close to him, and sit
Nearer the smoking roast than was the spit
  Which turned it tenderly;
Then, as his steel-tipped fingers rip and thrust
And dig the chicken stuffing up, he must
Cast well-bred glances of surprised disgust
  At all the company.

Such was the code for perfect sponges, drawn up in the city of Kufa by Tofayl, the crown and father of them all. Here, from a thousand, is one example of his method:

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-eighty-second Night
Had Come

She said:

A notable citizen once invited a few intimate friends to dine off a marvellous confection of mixed fishes. When the well-known voice of Tofayl was heard talking to the slave at the door, one of the guests cried: "Allah preserve us from the sponge! Let us at least save these fine big fishes from his fabulous appetite. Let us set them down in that dark corner, and only leave the little ones before us. When he has devoured the small fry and gone his way, we can finish our feast."

The bigger fish had scarcely been hidden when Tofayl entered, assured and smiling, and threw a casual greeting to the company. After calling upon the name of Allah, he set his hand to the dish, but contented himself with one small worthless sprat. The guests were delighted, and said to him: "Well, master Tofayl, what do you think of these fish? They hardly seem to take your fancy." "I have not been on good terms with fish for a long time," answered Tofayl, "my anger against fish is very terrible. My poor father was drowned at sea, and the savage brutes devoured him." "Then surely this is a good chance to avenge your father by devouring them," said one of the guests. "Perhaps you are right," exclaimed Tofayl, "but wait a moment." His parasitic eye had already searched out the fine and hidden fishes in the corner, so he lifted the smallest sprat from the dish and held it close to his ear, seeming to listen to its conversation. "Do you know what this little bit of a sprat has been saying?" he asked at length, and the guests answered: "As Allah lives, how should we know?" Then said Tofayl: "This is what he said: 'I was much too young to have eaten your good father, whom may Allah have in mercy! If you want revenge, apply to the big fish in the corner, for they were the very ones who threw themselves upon the poor old man and gobbled him up!"

The host and his guests realised that the trained nostrils of the parasite had winded their device; so, as well as they could for laughter, they set the fine big fish before him, saying: "Eat in Allah's name, and may they give you horrible indigestion!"

"And now," said the young man, "I will tell you the mournful tale of the fair Slave of Destiny."

And he began:

THE TALE OF THE SLAVE OF DESTINY

It is related by the annalists that the third Abbasside khalifat, Al-Mahdi, Commander of the Faithful, left his throne to his eldest son, Al-Hadi, whom he loved not and even hated; but insisted that, after Al-Hadi's death, his own younger and favourite son, Haroun Al-Rachid, should ascend to the throne, and not an heir of Al-Hadi's body.

When Al-Hadi was proclaimed Prince of Believers, he looked upon his brother Al-Rachid with growing jealousy and suspicion, and did all in his power to cheat him out of his right of succession. But Haroun's mother, the wise and holy Khayzaran, checkmated these designs, and with such consistency that the khalifat soon held her in equal detestation with her son, and only waited an opportunity for destroying both.

One day Al-Hadi sat in his garden, beneath a costly dome carried on eight columns and having four doors, each giving upon one of the cardinal points of the sky. The fair Gadir, his favourite slave, sat at his feet; he had only possessed her for forty days. The musician, Ishak of Mosul, was present also, and it was to his accompaniment upon the lute that Gadir sang and threw Al-Hadi into transports of delight. Outside the night fell, the moon rose among the trees, and water ran lisping in broken shadows to the murmur of the sunset breeze.

Suddenly joy was stricken from the khalifat's face, and he frowned. He sat in a silence dark as the oakum of an inker, and then said harshly: "Each has a fixed term, and none remains save the Eternal." After another interval of ill-omened reflection, he cried aloud: "Send Masrur to me quickly!" This Masrur, who was the instrument of Al-Hadi's anger and justice, had watched over the childhood of Al-Rachid, had borne him in his arms and on his shoulders. When he came into the presence, the khalifat said to him: "Go to my brother, Al-Rachid, and bring back his head."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-eighty-third Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

WHEN HE HEARD this sentence of death passed on his beloved, Masrur stood stockstill, as if he had been struck by lightning. "We come from Allah," he murmured, "and to Him we return at last!" Yet in the end he went out, though staggering like a drunken man.

He ran straight to the Princess Khayzaran, Al-Hadi's and Al-Rachid's mother, and, when she asked him why he had come so late and in such terror, answered: "O my mistress, there is no power or might save in Allah! Your son, our master the khalifat, has bidden me bring him the head of his brother Al-Rachid."

These words so beat upon the heart of Khayzaran that she had to lower her head and collect herself, before she said: "Run to Al-Rachid and bring him here at once."

Masrur hastened to Haroun's apartment, and, finding him already in bed, cried out: "In Allah's name rise up, my master, and come with me to your royal mother!"

Al-Rachid rose and dressed in haste; when he had come to his mother's presence, Khayzaran embraced him without a word and thrust him unresisting into a little secret room. Then she sent to fetch all the emirs and principal personages of the court, from where they were sleeping in their houses. When they were assembled in her apartment, she addressed them from behind the silk curtain of the harem, in these simple words: "I require you, in the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate, and in the name of His Prophet, to say if you have ever heard tell that my son Al-Rachid had lot or part with the enemies of the throne or with the Zanadic heresy, or that he has ever made the least movement of insubordination and revolt against his lord, Al-Hadi, your master and my son." When they had all answered with one voice that they had never heard any of these things, Khayzaran said: ‘‘Yet, even at this hour, my son Al-Hadi has sent for the head of his brother Al-Rachid.’’ The emirs and nobles were dumb with fear, but the wazir Rabia rose and whispered to Masrur: ‘‘Go at once to the khalifat and, when he asks you if you have done the deed, tell him that our Lady Khayzaran saw you about to fall upon Al-Rachid, and, pushing you away, prevented you from striking off his head.’’

So Masrur returned to Al-Hadi, and the khalifat cried: ‘‘Have you obeyed my order?’’ ‘‘O my master,’’ answered Masrur, ‘‘the Princess Khayzaran, my mistress, saw me as I was about to throw myself upon your brother and, pushing me back, prevented me from doing the deed.’’ When he heard this, Al-Hadi rose, at the limit of his anger, and said to Ishak and the slave: ‘‘Stay here, for I shall soon return.’’

The emirs and notables rose at the sudden entry of the khalifat, but Al-Hadi took no notice of them and turned to his mother, saying in a voice which trembled for rage: ‘‘When I have given an order, how dare you gainsay it?’’ ‘‘Allah preserve me from gainsaying you in anything, O Commander of the Faithful,’’ answered Khayzaran, ‘‘I only wished to know why you have condemned my second son to death. He is your blood brother, he is of the same vital and spiritual essence as yourself.’’ Then said Al-Hadi: ‘‘If you must know, I was decided in my course by a terrible dream which I had last night. I saw Al-Rachid sitting upon my throne, drinking and playing with my favourite slave Gadir. As I love both my throne and my favourite, I will allow no dangerous rival near me, were he ten times my brother.’’ ‘‘These are the false illusions of sleep, my lord,’’ urged Khayzaran, ‘‘These are the visions born of heating meats. A dream is seldom true, my son.'' She spoke on in this way, while the emirs looked approval at her, until she had calmed Al-Hadi and relieved his fears. Then she fetched Al-Rachid out of the little secret room and made him swear before his brother that he had never had the least thought of treachery, or lightest ambition for the throne.

When the last wisp of his anger had dissipated, Al-Hadi returned to his pleasure dome and, sending Ishak away, prepared to bathe himself with Gadir in the waters of night and love. But suddenly he felt a sharp pain in the sole of one foot and, carrying his hand to the spot, began to scratch the itching of it. In a few moments a little tumour formed, which grew to the size of a nut; this burned and itched intolerably so that Al-Hadi was forced to scratch again. At once the tumour increased to the size of a walnut, and burst of its own accord. Then Al-Hadi fell back lifeless upon the floor.

The reason of Al-Hadi's death was this: during the few minutes for which the khalifat had remained with her after the reconciliation, Khayzaran had made him drink of a tamarind sherbert which held the sentence of destiny.

The first to learn of his death was the eunuch Masrur; he ran at once to his mistress, saying: ''Allah prolong your days, O mother of the khalifat! My master Al-Hadi is dead.'' ''That is well,'' answered the queen, ''but keep the news secret until you have fetched Al-Rachid to me again.''

So Masrur went to Al-Rachid and roused him out of sleep, saying: ''The queen calls you, my lord.'' ''As Allah lives,'' cried Haroun in a panic, ''my brother has told her something else against me; he has accused me of some new plot of which I am quite innocent." But Masrur interrupted, saying: "O Haroun, follow me quickly. Calm your dear spirit and refresh your eyes, for all goes very well and nought but joy awaits you."

Haroun rose and dressed; then Masrur bowed before him, kissing the earth between his hands, as he cried: "Greeting and salutation, O Commander of the Faithful, O Imam of the servants of God, O Khalifat Allah upon earth, Defender of the Faith, and Weapon of the Law!" "What do you mean, Masrur?" demanded Al-Rachid, swaying between astonishment and uncertainty, "A moment ago you called me by my simple name, and now you hail me as Commander of the Faithful. What is this sudden change?"

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-eighty-fourth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

"MASTER," ANSWERED MASRUR, "each life is put out into the world with a destiny and a term. May the Giver prolong your days, for your brother is dead!" "Allah have him in pity," said Al-Rachid. Freed for the first time from fear and care, he hastened to his mother, and she cried when she saw him: "Delight and happiness! Delight and happiness for the Prince of Believers!" She put the royal mantle upon him and gave him the sceptre and the supreme seal. As she was thus decking him in his sovereignty, the chief eunuch of the harem entered, saying to Haroun: "I bring good news, my master! A son has been born to you by Marahil, your slave!'' Doubly rejoicing, the khalifat gave his son the name of Abdalla Al-Mamun.

News of Al-Hadi's death and the accession of Al-Rachid had gone about all Baghdad before the dawn. Haroun received with royal dignity the allegiance of his emirs and nobles, and, in the same hour, raised Al-Fadl and Giafar, two sons of Yahia the Barmacide, to the post of wazir. All the lands and dependencies of the empire and all peoples who confessed Islam swore obedience to the new khalifat, and the world's most powerful and glorious reign began.

Now I will tell you about Gadir, the slave in whose arms Al-Hadi died.

On the evening of his elevation to the throne, Al-Rachid, who had heard of her beauty, wished to behold her while his eyes were still fresh to the delights of royalty. He went to her, and said: ''I wish you to come with me to the garden and the dome where my brother Al-Hadi—Allah pity him!—delighted to take his pleasure and his ease.'' Gadir, who was already wearing garments of deep mourning, lowered her head, and answered: ''The Commander of the Faithful is my lord and I am his slave.'' She changed her robes of grief for ones more suitable and then hurried to the pleasure dome. Al-Rachid bade her sit by his side, and feasted his eyes upon her unrivalled beauty until his heart was dancing for joy. But, when the wines which he loved were handed about and Haroun would have had her drink, Gadir refused. ''Why do you refuse?'' asked the khalifat, and she answered: ''Wine without music loses a little of its generosity. I would be glad if that excellent Ishak were here to bear us musical company.'' ''It is permitted,'' said Al-Rachid graciously, and he sent Masrur for the musician, who soon entered and stood before him. When Ishak had kissed the earth between his hands, the khalifat bade him seat himself opposite the favourite.

The wine cup passed about, and they drank it out until the night was dark about them. Suddenly Ishak cried under the inspiration of the wine: "Eternal praise to Him who with His hand alters the course of life, bringing about succession and demission!" "Of what are you thinking, O son of Ibrahim?" asked Al-Rachid, and the singer answered: "Alas, my lord, yesterday, at this hour, your brother leaned from that window and watched the streams pass lisping to the night, beneath the womanish moon; and these glad things so terrified him that he would have made you drink a bitter cup." Then said Al-Rachid: "O Ishak, the lives of all men are written in the Book of Destiny. How could my brother have killed me, since my time had not yet come?" Then he turned to the fair Gadir, and asked her: "What do you say, my girl?" For answer, Gadir took up her lute, and sang in a trembling voice:

In life of time two rivers join,
One muddy and one clear;
Two days in time of life there are,
The soft and the severe;
You may trust time and life as far
As you would trust the spinning of a coin,
Or very near.

And when she had made an end of this song, Al-Hadi's favourite fell to the ground and lay there without movement. They shook her and succoured her, but she lived no longer; she had taken refuge in the breast of Allah. "She loved the dead, my lord," said

Ishak, "It is a poor love which lasts only till the grave is digged. Allah grant His mercy to Al-Hadi, and to his favourite, and to all of us!"

A tear dropped from Al-Rachid's eye; he ordered the body to be washed and set in the same tomb with Al-Hadi. "Yes," he said, "Allah grant His mercy to Al-Hadi, and his favourite, and to all of us!"

When he had finished this moving history, the young man said to his guests: "Now hear another manifestation of Destiny in the tale of the Fatal Collar."

And he said:

THE TALE OF THE FATAL COLLAR

One day the Khalifat Haroun Al-Rachid, who had heard tell of the great talent of Hashim bin Sulayman, the singer, sent for him and begged for a taste of his quality in composition. Hashim sang a melody in three stanzas, with so much art and in so exquisite a voice that Al-Rachid cried: "Blessed be your father's spirit, for you have excelled, O son of Sulayman!" So saying, he lifted a magnificent collar, enriched with drop emeralds as large as musk pears, from about his neck and fastened it upon that of the singer.

But, instead of rejoicing at this gift, Hashim allowed his eyes to fill with tears. A weight of sadness descended upon his heart, and his cheeks became yellow.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-eighty-fifth Night
Had Come

She said:

Al-Rachid, who had expected delight, supposed that this ornament was not to the other's taste, so he said: "Why, these sad tears, O Hashim, and why, if the collar does not please you, do you keep a silence which is equally awkward for us both?" "May Allah increase His favour upon the most generous of all kings!" answered the musician, "My grief is not such as you suppose, dear master. If you allow me, I will tell you the tale of this collar, and you will understand why the sight of it saddens me so much." "You have my leave to speak," replied Al-Rachid, "for surely the story must be astonishing if it explains how an heirloom of my race can cause so great a grief."

So the singer collected his memories, and then said:

The matter of the collar dates back to my first youth, when I dwelt in my native land of Sham. One evening, as I walked at dusk on the borders of our lake, dressed as an Arab of that desert and having my face muffled to the eyes, I met a man magnificently clad, and accompanied, against all usage, by two most beautiful girls, singers, to judge them by the lutes they carried. A first glance I recognised the khalifat Al-Walid, second of that name, who had left Damascus to hunt gazelles beside this Lake Tabariah.

When he saw me, the khalifat turned to his two companions, saying in a voice intended for them alone: "Here is an Arab just in from the desert, one of those foolish savages. As Allah lives, I will call him to keep us company, and we can jest a little at his expense.'' He signed to me with his hand and, when I had come near, made me sit down beside him on the grass, facing the two singers.

Then, at her lord's command, one of the girls tuned her lute and sang a song of mine, in a moving voice but with a few mistakes and certain mutilations of the air. Although I had put on a mask of impassivity, in order not to draw down the khalifat's raillery before its time, I could not help crying: ''That was by no means perfect, girl.'' The singer gave a mocking laugh, and said to the khalifat: ''O Commander of the Faithful, this camel-boy had dared to accuse me of mistakes!'' Al-Walid looked at me, at once frowning and smiling, and asked: ''Do they teach singing and the delicate art of music in your tribe?'' ''They do not, O Prince of Believers,'' I answered with a respectful inclination, ''but, if you give me leave, I can convict this admirable player of certain errors.'' The khalifat gave his permission, and I said to the girl: ''Tighten your second string a quarter and loose your fourth the same; then begin with the lower mode of the melody. You will find the passages which you muddled come straight of themselves, and the run and expression of the whole vastly improved.''

In a dumb surprise to hear a savage talk so, the young woman tuned her lute again, according to my direction, and sang the song a second time. When it came forth with all perfection of beauty, she threw herself at my feet, crying: ''You are Hashim bin Sulayman, I swear it by the Lord of the Kaaba!'' I was no less moved than she and could say no word; but, when the khalifat asked me if her guess were correct, I uncovered my face and answered: ''O Commander of the Faithful, I am indeed your slave Hashim.''

Al-Walid was delighted to make my acquaintance, and said: "I give thanks to Allah that He has set you upon my way, O son of Sulayman. This girl admires you above all the musicians of our time, and will play and sing your compositions only. I would have you for my friend."

When I had kissed his hand in sign of thanks, the singer turned towards Al-Walid, saying: "O Prince of Believers, have I your permission to mark a happy meeting by giving a token to this master?" "The wish is most suitable," replied the khalifat. So the charming child took a magnificent collar from about her neck and fastened it on mine, saying: "Excuse the poverty, and accept the homage!" This collar had been given to her by Al-Walid himself, and was the same which you have hung about my neck today.

And now for the reason of my tears:

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-eighty-sixth Night
Had Come

She said:

When we had sung together for a little, the breeze came cool from the water, and Al-Walid said: "Let us row upon the lake." Slaves, who had stood far off, ran down and brought round a boat to us. The khalifat boarded her first and I followed him; when the girl who had given me the collar put forth her foot to embark, she was troubled by the great veil in which she had muffled herself because of the rowers, and missed her footing. Before any of us could help her, she had disappeared below the water, and, in spite of all our searchings, her body was never found. Allah have her in His mercy!

Al-Walid wept abundantly in his bitter grief, and I wept also. After long silence, he said to me: "The loss would have been heavier, if we had not still that collar to serve as a memory of her short life. I will not take it back from you, but I beg that you will sell it to me."

I handed the emerald toy to the Khalifat, and, when we returned to the city, he paid me thirty thousand silver dirhams, and added precious gifts to them.

Now you know the reason of my tears, O Commander of the Faithful. Allah in His wisdom dispossessed the dynasty of Omar and gave the throne to your glorious ancestors. That is how the collar came to be among your treasures and to return to me so strangely.

Al-Rachid was moved by this tale, and said: "Allah have mercy on all who have deserved mercy!" By this general formula he avoided the naming of a name which belonged to a rival dynasty.

"And, since we are on the subject of music and singing," said the rich young man, "I will tell you one tale, out of a thousand, concerning the life of Ishak bin Ibrahim of Mosul, the greatest musician of any age."

And he said:

ISHAK OF MOSUL AND THE LOST MELODY

Among the many writings which have come down to us in the hand of Ishak bin Ibrahim of Mosul, we find the following:

I entered the presence one day and found Haroun Al-Rachid sitting with his wazir Al-Fadl and a sheikh of Hedjaz, whose handsome face was marked with grave nobility. After greeting, I leaned towards Al-Fadl and asked the stranger's name, for his appearance pleased me and I had never seen him before. "He is the grandson of Maabad of Hedjaz, the poet and singer," answered Al-Fadl, "The name should be familiar to you." He must have seen by my face that I was delighted to meet the descendant of one whom I had so admired in youth, for he whispered to me presently: "O Ishak, if you make yourself agreeable to this old man, he will sing you all his grandfather's songs, for he has a fine memory as well as a charming voice."

So, wishing to make trial of the man's method and to be reminded of the old songs which had charmed my adolescence, I made myself pleasant to the sheikh of Hedjaz, and, after friendly talk of this and that, was bold to say: "Most noble sheikh can you tell me how many songs your grandfather composed?" "Just sixty," answered the old man, and I asked again: "Would it be trespassing too far upon your patience if I begged you to name your favourite?" "Easily the finest of them all," said he, "is the forty-third song, which begins with the line: *Beauty of the neck of Molaïka, my Molaïka of the breasts . . .*"

Then, as if this simple saying over of the line inspired him, he took the lute from my hand and sang the whole song through to a very light accompaniment. His voice was astonishingly full and true, and he brought such deep emotion from the old music that I was rapt quite outside myself to hear him. As I could rely upon my memory, which retains the most complicated air when I have heard it once, I did not trouble to sing the song over after him, but contented myself with thanking the old man from the bottom of my heart. Soon we parted, he for Medina and I, still drunken with the melody, to my own house.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-eighty-seventh Night
Had Come

She said:

When I got home, I took down and burnished my lute, and tuned it to perfection. But, as Allah lives, I could not play that air of Hedjaz which had moved me so, I could not remember one note of it, I could not even call to mind the mode in which it had been written. I can usually retain a hundred couplets and their melody when I have listened once with a negligent ear, but this time it was as if an impenetrable woollen curtain had fallen between the music and my mind.

Night and day I racked my brains and spurred them to remember, but all to no purpose. At last, in despair, I left my lute and my singing lessons behind, and went journeying through Baghdad, through Mosul and Bassora, and finally through the whole of Irak, questioning the oldest singers concerning Maabad's forty-third song. But none of them could help me to it.

Rather than be ridden eternally by this obsession, I made up my mind to cross the desert to far Medina and beg the poet's grandson to sing me the song again. I was in Bassora at the time, and rode by the river as I came to this decision. Suddenly two young women in rich robes, seeming of high rank, seized the bridle of my ass and brought him to a standstill.

Having no thought except for the song, I answered their greeting with a gruff: "Leave go!" and would have snatched away the bridle. But one of the beauties smiled below her discreet veil, saying: "Where is your passion for Maabad's song, O Ishak? What has come to: *O beauty of the neck of Molaïka?* Have you given up your search?" Then, before I had time to answer, she said again: "I was behind the lattice of the harem, Ishak. I was watching you when the old man of Hedjaz sang his song to the khalifat and Al-Fadl. I saw you twitch, I saw the cushions dancing; you wagged your head and balanced on your feet, O Ishak! I thought that you were mad."

"By the memory of my father, I am madder now than ever after that song!" I cried, "I would give anything to hear it, even if it were sung off the key, even if it were cut. I would give ten years of my life for a single note! You have fanned the flame of my regret, O tenderness, you have breathed upon the coal of my despair. Why did you remind me of it, why did you bring the whole scene back to me? For pity's sake, let me go to Medina!"

But the girl laughed, instead of loosing the bridle, and then asked: "If I can sing you the song, will you still go to Medina?" "Do not torture me so. O daughter of excellent parents!" I entreated, "I have told you that I am mad already."

Then the woman suddenly started singing the song of my infatuation, and the voice and skill of her were a thousand times more wonderful than the sheikh's. Yet it was only at half voice she sang! As I listened, a great calm fell upon my troubled heart, I threw myself from the saddle at the girl's feet and kissed the hem of her robe, saying: "I am your slave, bought by your generosity. Will you allow me to entertain you at my house? You can sing me the song of Molaïka, and I will sing all day and all night to you. Yes, all day and all night!" But the girl answered: "O Ishak, we know your character, we know the greed with which you hoard your compositions. No pupil has ever learnt more than one song from your own lips, or been allowed to sing more than one song which you have made yourself. The rest of their stock is the work of others and taught by others, Alawiah, Wahj Al-Karah, Mukharik, or the like. I fear you are too jealous to treat us suitably, O Ishak. If your only desire is to learn the song, I will gladly sing it to you, until you have it pat." "And I will pour out my blood for you, O daughter of heaven!" I cried, "But who are you? What is your name?"

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-eighty-eighth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

"I AM A SIMPLE SINGER," she answered, "one of those who have overheard what the leaves say to the birds, and the breezes to the leaves. My name is Wahba; I am she whom the poet praised in the song which bears my name." And she sang:

Joy stays all night by your white side to sigh;
"Now not an hour is wasted, Wahba."
He knows the water of your mouth, which none but I
Have tasted, Wahba.

He knows it rarer than the silver rain
When thirst expects her visit, Wahba.
You brimmed its scarlet chalice once, and not again;
I miss it, Wahba.

Oh, be not like the fabled cock which lays
Once in a lifetime only, Wahba;
Come and perfume my dwelling, for the laggard days
Are lonely, Wahba.

And bring that softer dew than morning's is
Which weighs no tenderest fronds down, Wahba,
That dew more light than karkafa or kandaris
Or swan's-down, Wahba.

The words of this song were by the poet Farruj, and Wahba herself had composed a delicate air to it. The words and their melody and the singing of them quite maddened me, and I begged so hard that at last the girl consented to come to my house with her sister. We passed the rest of that day and all the night in an ecstasy of music, and I found in Wahba a talent which I have not yet seen equalled. Love of her ate even to my soul, and a time came when she gave me her flesh as she had given me her voice. She was an ornament to my life for many happy years.

"And now," said the rich young man, "I will tell you an anecdote concerning court-dancers."

And he began:

THE TWO DANCERS

There was in Damascus during the reign of Abd Al-Malik bin Marwan, a poet musician called Ibn Abu-Atik, who spent all the gains of his art and all the charity of the Damascene emirs in a mad profusion of prodigalities. Thus, in spite of his considerable earnings, he lived in perpetual want and was hard put to it to find food for his large family. Gold in the hands of a poet and patience in the heart of a lover are like water in a sieve.

One of the poet's friends was Abdalla the chamberlain, an intimate of the khalifat; and this good man, after interesting many of the city's notables on the rake's behalf, resolved at length to gain for him the favour of his royal master. One day, when the khalifat was in the best possible humour, Abdalla broached the subject and painted in sombre colours the destitution of one who had a right to be considered the greatest poet at that time living in the land of Sham. "You may send him to me," said Abd Al-Malik bin Marwan.

The chamberlain ran with this good news to his friend, and the poet, with many expressions of thanks, prepared to present himself at the palace.

When he was introduced into the presence, he found the khalifat sitting between two superb dancing girls, who balanced as gracefully upon their feet as if they had been two branches of the ban, and moved with languid grace two palm-leaf fans to cool their master.

On one of the fans was painted in letters of blue and gold:

Cool and light the air I fling to
The rose-modest girls I kiss.
Sometimes I relent and bring, too,
Shield for other kisses—this.

And on the other fan was painted in letters of blue and gold:

I desire pale hands and palaces,
All inelegance I despise;
Girls, then? No, that's one of your fallacies—
With cool sleep I kiss his eyes.

When the poet had considered these two breathing miracles, he began to shiver with pleasure and felt himself snatched, as it were, into a comfortable blaze of light. He thought himself in Paradise, with two houris who had been specially set aside, and looked back on all the women whom he had known as ugly fools.

After the first homage and greeting, the khalifat said: "O Ibn Abu-Atik, I have heard from Abdalla of the deep misery into which you and yours have fallen, and have called you into my presence to satisfy any desire you may express to me." The poet was so dazzled by the dancers that he hardly understood what the khalifat was saying; indeed, had he done so clearly, his mind would not have dwelt for an instant upon the idea of money or food. His soul had but one inspiration, the beauty of the dancers, his body but one desire, to hold them and grow drunk beneath their eyes.

Therefore he answered: "Allah prolong your days, O Commander of the Faithful! Your slave has already been greatly blessed by the Giver; he is rich, he lacks for nothing, he is an emir! His eyes are content, his soul is content, his heart is content. Standing thus in the presence of the sun between two moons, he is the richest man in all your kingdom."

Abd Al-Malik was pleased by this answer. Also, as he saw the poet's eyes craving for that which his lips dared not express, he rose up from between the dancers, saying: ''O Ibn Abu-Atik, I received these girls from the king of Roum today; they are yours, they are your fields. It is lawful to enter into your fields by any road you wish.'' And he left the three together.

After the poet had taken his dancers home, Abdalla returned to the palace, and the khalifat said to him: ''O Abdalla, surely you a little exaggerated the wretched state of your friend the poet? He swore to me that he was utterly happy and lacked for nothing at all.'' Abdalla felt his face covered with confusion and stood silent, as Al-Malik continued: ''Yes, yes, Abdalla, the man was happier than anyone I have ever seen.'' He repeated the poet's extravagant words of satisfaction, and Abdalla replied, half smiling and half offended: ''I swear by the dear life of your head, O Commander of the Faithful, that the man has lied! He has lied very shamelessly! He is the most wretched, the most entirely destitute of your subjects; the sight of his wife and children would make you weep. There is no beggar upon the road who has such need of the crumbs of your charity.''

When Abdalla was dismissed from the presence, he hastened to Ibn Abu-Atik's house.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-eighty-ninth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

HE FOUND THE poet sitting in an expansion of delight, with a dancer on each knee and a great tray of wine cups in front of him. "You madman," he cried roughly, as he entered, "why did you give me the lie before the khalifat? You have darkened my face until it can be no blacker." "My friend," answered the poet joyfully, "who could whine about poverty or sing of misery in those very glorious surroundings? It would have been a poor compliment to these two ladies; and, moreover, I would not have been rewarded so richly. Joy is much better paid than sorrow, my friend."

With that he held out an enormous cup, filled to the brim with a laughing and musk-scented wine. "Drink beneath the black light of these eyes, my friend," he said, "the black light of my folly!" Then, with a double gesture, he continued: "These are mine. How could I have asked for more, without offending Allah?"

As Abdalla smiled in spite of himself and lifted the cup to his lips, the poet took up his lute and sang, after a sparkling prelude:

Lively and light-footed as if sprayed
From dancing fountains,
Such is each slender-flanked gazelle;
Her breasts are pear-shaped cups of jade
Against a sky of light.

Should I not sing, then? If the bald
And ancient mountains
Had drunken of these girls as well,
They would have jumped and sung and called
And danced in their delight.

And, from that time, the poet Ibn Abu-Atik lived as he had lived before, trusting his destiny to the

Master of all, and careless of the morrow. The two dancers remained his consolation in despair, and an abiding joy until his death.

"And I will also tell you the tale of The Pistachio Oil Cream," said the young man.

THE PISTACHIO OIL CREAM, AND THE LEGAL POINT

THE SUPREME KADI of Baghdad during the reign of Haroun Al-Rachid was Yacub Abu-Yussef. He possessed an acuter mind and a greater knowledge of the law than any other man in the city, and had been the pupil and dear companion of the imam Abu-Hanifah. Indeed, it was he who clarified, assembled, and co-ordinated the admirable Hanafite doctrine, which is the basis of all orthodox procedure even in our own time.

He tells us the story of his youth and humble beginnings, and in it deals both with pistachio oil cream and an intricate legal difficulty. He says:

When my father died—Allah have him in mercy and keep a chosen place for him!—I was still a little boy, but we were so poor that my mother soon apprenticed me to a dyer, and I was supporting our house at a much earlier age than is usual.

But Allah had not worked any dye into my destiny, and, instead of spending all my day at the vats, I would escape, as often as possible, to join the circle of listeners who met to receive religious teaching from the imam Abu-Hanifah (Allah reward him!). My mother had her suspicions, and would sometimes follow my truantry and drag me from the presence of that venerable master. On these occasions she would beat and scold me, and force me back into the dyer's shop.

Yet I managed to attend the imam's lessons regularly, and that holy man soon began to point me out as an example of zeal and thirst for knowledge. Indeed I spent so little time among the dyes that at length my mother came to the assembly and, in the scandalised silence of all his pupils, cursed Abu-Hanifah loud, saying: "It is you, O sheikh, who are corrupting this child and driving him into the way of penury. I can earn but little with my spindle, and, if this poor orphan does not hold by his trade, the two of us may soon expect to starve to death. It will be your responsibility at the Day of Judgment." My master lost none of his calm at this tirade, but answered my mother pleasantly: "Allah shower down His blessings upon you, O woman of the poor! But it is not bread that this poor orphan is learning to eat here, it is pistachio oil cream." These strange words persuaded my mother that the venerable imam was not right in the head, and, as she retired, she threw this final insult over her shoulder: "May Allah shorten your days, old babbler! Your brains are softening upon you!" But I remembered the words of the imam.

Allah had planted the passion of study in my heart, and therefore it triumphed over every difficulty. I fervently frequented Abu-Hanifah, and the learning he gave me lifted me step by step until I became the supreme kadi of Baghdad, and was the constant guest of the khalifat himself.

One day, as I sat at meat with Haroun Al-Rachid, the slaves brought in a great porcelain dish where trembled a fair white cream, snowed with grated pistachios and giving forth a delightful smell. "Taste some of this dish, O Yacub," said the khalifat, "Even my most expert cooks cannot always succeed with it, but today I can see that it is excellent." "What is it called, O Commander of the Faithful?" I asked, "What are its ingredients, that it should look and smell so very sweet?" Then said Haroun: "It is a *baluza,* prepared with cream, honey, fine white flour, and the oil of pistachios."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-ninetieth Night
Had Come

She said:

When I heard these words, I could not help smiling. "Why do you smile, O Yacub?" asked the khalifat; and I replied: "For nothing but good, O Commander of the Faithful. A simple memory of childhood passed through my brain, and I smiled to see it pass." "Tell me of it quickly," said Al-Rachid, "for I am sure that it will be profitable to hear."

So I told of my first steps under the guidance of Abu-Hanifah, of my mother's despair on seeing me forsake the vats, and of the imam's prediction concerning pistachio oil cream.

Haroun was delighted by my tale, and said: "An application to learning will always bear fruit, and the advantage of that fruit will be both secular and religious. The venerable Abu-Hanifah was a wise prophet, he saw with the eyes of his soul what other men could not see with their eyes of flesh. May Allah grant him mercy and the most scented of His pleasures in Paradise!''

So much for the pistachio oil cream. Now for the legal difficulty.

One evening, when I had retired early, being more weary than usual, I was woken from a deep sleep by a violent knocking upon my door. I wrapped my loins in a woollen izar and went down to find Hartdama, the confidential eunuch of the khalifat. Instead of taking time to answer my greeting, he threw me into great terror by crying: ''Come with me to our master at once, for he wishes to speak with you.'' ''O my dear Hartdama,'' I answered, ''have a little consideration for a sick old man. The night is far spent, and surely this matter can stay over till the morning. Perhaps by then the Prince of Believers will have forgotten, or have changed his mind.'' But the eunuch answered: ''As Allah lives, I dare not disobey.'' ''Yet you can at least tell me why I am summoned,'' I ventured. ''Masrur came running to me,'' replied Hartdama, ''He was quite out of breath and gave me the command without an explanation.''

This uncertainty perplexed me, and I said: ''O Hartdama, will you not at least allow me to wash quickly and perfume myself a little? If the business is serious, I shall then be suitably prepared to meet it; and, if, as I hope, the affair is trivial, a trifle of washing and scenting will have done me no harm.''

The eunuch allowed me this favour, and I was washed, perfumed, and properly dressed, when I rejoined him. We went swiftly to the palace and found Masrur waiting for us at the door. ''Here is the kadi,'' said Hartdama, and Masrur bade me follow him. As we entered the palace, I made bold to say:

"O Masrur, you know that I am a devoted servant to the khalifat, you know what is due to a man of my age and position, you know that I have always been your friend; can you not tell me why our master requires me at this strange hour?" "I myself do not know," answered Masrur. "You can at least tell me who is with him," I urged, with my knees knocking together. "Issa the chamberlain is alone with him," he replied, "and Issa's slave is in the neighbouring room."

But I refused to understand yet, and cried: "I put my trust in Allah! There is no power or might save in Him!" As I came towards the khalifat's apartment, I stepped heavily so that I should be heard, and a voice cried: "Who is there?" "Your servant Yacub, O Commander of the Faithful," I answered, and Haroun bade me enter.

I found the khalifat seated with his chamberlain Issa on his right hand. I prostrated myself and then gave greeting; to my great relief my greeting was returned, and Al-Rachid asked with a smile: "We have troubled you, upset you, perhaps frightened you?" "Only frightened, O Prince of Believers," I replied, "I and mine were quite bowled over by your message." Then said the khalifat: "Be seated, O father of the law."

When I had taken my seat, with relief singing about my heart, the khalifat turned to me, saying: "O Yacub, do you know why we have called you thus in the dead of night?" "I do not, O Commander of the Faithful," I replied. "I required you to bear witness to a solemn oath which I am about to take," explained Al-Rachid, with a gesture towards the chamberlain, "Issa here has a slave which he refuses either to give or sell to me; you, as the supreme kadi of Baghdad, must be present when I swear, by the most exalted name of Allah, to kill this Issa if he will not let me have the slave in one of these two ways.''

Quite certain now that I was out of all danger, I gave Issa a stern glance, and cried: ''Tell me what strange quality or virtue Allah has given to this girl of yours, that you will not relinquish her to the khalifat. Do you not see that your refusal is degrading to you and much disparages your soul?'' ''O our lord the kadi,'' replied the unmoved chamberlain, ''There is something lamentable in a precipitation of judgment. Blame me, if you will, when you have heard my reason.'' ''Can there be a valid reason for such conduct?'' I demanded. ''There can be, and there is,'' asserted Issa, ''An oath which is made with full consent and in all clarity of mind may not be set aside. I have sworn, by the triple divorce and on a promise to free all my slaves and to make over my riches to the poor, that I will never sell or give away this girl.''

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-ninety-first Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

''O YACUB, IS there no way of resolving this difficulty?'' asked the khalifat. ''There is,'' I answered without a moment's hesitation, ''and a very easy way. Issa has only to give you half of the girl and sell you the other half, then he will be at one with his conscience.''

''But would that be legal, O father of jurisprudence? Would the law accept such a compromise?'' asked Issa; but, when I had replied that the law most certainly would, he lifted his hand quickly, crying: ''Then I take you to witness, O kadi, that I give one half of my slave to the khalifat, and that I sell him the other half for that sum of a hundred thousand silver dirhams which the whole of her cost me.'' ''I accept the gift,'' Al-Rachid answered, ''but I pay a hundred thousand gold dinars for the second half. Bring me the girl!''

The money was counted out in sacks, and Issa fetched in the girl to his master, saying: ''Take her, O Prince of Believers, for she is yours. May Allah abundantly bless you by her means!''

When the chamberlain had departed, Al-Rachid turned to me, and said anxiously: ''There remains a second difficulty. As this girl has been another man's slave, the law requires her to be set aside until it be proved that she is not pregnant by her former master. But, if I do not lie with her tonight, I am quite sure that my liver will burst and I shall die.''

I gave a moment to reflection, and than answered: ''There is nothing difficult about that, O Commander of the Faithful. The law is applicable to slaves, but not to free women. You can free her at once and then marry her.'' The shadow cleared from Al-Rachid's face, and he cried: ''I free this slave.'' Then the shadow returned, and he asked: ''But who can marry us at such an hour? It is now, and not tomorrow, that I wish to lie with her.'' ''I can marry you myself,'' I answered.

I called Masrur and Hosseyn as witnesses and, in their presence, performed the marriage ceremony, stipulating, as is customary, that the khalifat should give his bride an immediate dowry. The sum I assessed myself at twenty thousand dinars.

When this gold had been brought and handed over to the girl, I made as if to retire; but Haroun called Masrur to him, saying: "As a recompense for the trouble which we have caused him, carry two hundred thousand dirhams to the house of the kadi, together with twenty robes of honour." I bowed myself out with many thanks, leaving a delighted prince behind me, and returned home, accompanied by slaves who bore the money and the robes.

Hardly had I crossed my threshold when an old woman entered to me, saying: "O Abu-Yussef, the happy child who has been freed and married to the khalifat by your advice, she who has gained the proud title, wife of the Commander of the Faithful, ranks herself now as your daughter and sends me with filial greeting. She begs you to accept half of the dowry which the khalifat has given her, and to excuse the poverty of her offering. She hopes to express her gratitude more fully in the future." With that the old woman set down ten thousand golden dinars before me, and, after kissing my hand, departed upon her way.

I thanked Allah for having, of His infinite mercy, changed my anxiety to joy, and in my heart I blessed the venerable memory of Abu-Hanifah, who had taught me all the subtleties of civil and religious law. May God be good to him!

"And now, my friends," said the rich young man, "listen to the tale of The Arab Girl at the Fountain."

And he began:

THE ARAB GIRL AT THE FOUNTAIN

The accession to the throne of Al-Mamun, Haroun Al-Rachid's son, proved a blessing to the empire, for he was incomparably the wisest and most brilliant of the Abbassides. He made his lands fertile with peace and justice, he honoured and efficiently protected both scholars and poets, and started the intelligence of his time, as if it had been a ball, rolling in the polo ground of knowledge. Yet, in spite of days filled with toil and study, he contrived to find hours for gaiety and feasting; and, at these times, it was the singers and musicians who won the chief part of his approbation and reward. He always chose his wives, the mothers of his children, from among the most beautiful and intellectual women of that age. Here is one example out of twenty of the way he selected a wife.

One day, as he was returning from a hunt with his escort, he came to a fountain, near which an Arab girl stood in the act of slinging a full waterskin to her shoulder. Allah had given her a perfect figure of five spans, and a breast cast in the mould of perfection. For the rest she was a full moon on the night of full moon.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-ninety-second Night
Had Come

She said:

When she saw this brilliant troop of riders, the girl walked away, but, in her haste, she did not take time to fasten the neck of the skin securely. Therefore she had hardly made a few steps before the water began to gush out noisily upon the ground. At once the girl turned in the direction of her dwelling, and cried: "Father, father, come and arrange the neck of this skin! The neck has betrayed me! I am no longer mistress of the neck!"

These three cries for help showed such an excellent choice of words and were given in so delightful a voice, that the khalifat reined in to listen. As there was no response to her calling, the girl set down the skin; and then it was that the khalifat spoke to her. "What is your tribe, my child?" he asked; and she answered in a tone which delighted him: "I belong to the Bani-Kilab." Though Al-Mamun was well aware that this tribe was one of the noblest of all, he wished to prove the mind of the girl and therefore played upon words, saying: "Do you not mind belonging to the tribe of Dogsons?" "Are you really so ignorant of the true meaning?" the girl demanded mockingly, "If you are, I must tell you that the tribe of the Bani-Kilab are the tribe of Faultless Generosity. They know how to entreat strangers with magnificence, they also know how to use the sword. But what is your own line and pedigree, O rider?" Instead of answering, the khalifat laughed and asked: "Are you by chance as learned in genealogy as you are pre-eminent in beauty?" "Answer my question and you shall see," retorted the girl. So Al-Mamun, entering into the spirit of the game, and wishing to know whether the girl understood the ramifications of his royal lineage, condescended to reply: "My line is the line of the Red Mudharides." The maiden knew that this qualification of colour came from the red leather tent which Mudhar, the father of those tribes which bear his name, had used in the desert; therefore she showed no surprise, and asked again: "And to what tribe of the Mudharides do you belong?" "To the most illustrious," answered Al-Mamun, "To the one which has the best breeding on the male and female sides, the one which all the other Mudharides revere." "Then your tribe is the tribe of the Kinanides," exclaimed the girl. When Al-Mamun had admitted with some surprise that this was so, she smiled and asked again: "To what branch of the Kinanides do you belong?" "To the purest," he replied, "to the most generous, to the most feared." "Then you must be one of the Korayshides," said the girl. "You are right," allowed Al-Mamun, marvelling more and more, "I belong to the Bani-Koraysh." "But the Korayshides have many branches," objected the girl, "Which is your branch?" "The one which received benediction," he answered. "Then, as Allah lives," cried the girl, "you are descended from Hashim the Korayshide, who was the great-grandfather of the Prophet (on whom be prayer and peace!)." "I am in truth a Hashimide," said Al-Mamun, and the girl asked: "But what is your family among the Hashimides?" "The noblest glory of them all," he said, "That which is venerated by each Believer in the world." Immediately the maiden prostrated herself and kissed the earth between his hands, crying: "Veneration and homage to the Commander of the Faithful, to Allah's vicar upon earth, Al-Mamun, the glorious Abbasside!"

The khalifat was profoundly and joyfully moved by this speech; in the hearing of all his escort he proclaimed: "By the Lord of the Kaaba and the pure merit of my glorious ancestors, I will marry this admirable child! She is the noblest jewel which has been set in my destiny."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-ninety-third Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

HE CALLED THE CHIEF of the tribe, who was the girl's father, and obtained his consent to the marriage, paying him a hundred thousand golden dinars as a portion, and writing in his name all the taxes of Hedjaz for five years.

The wedding was celebrated with a pomp which had never been equalled, even during the reign of Al-Rachid. On the night of penetration Al-Mamun gave the girl's mother a thousand pearls on a gold dish to pour over her daughter's head; and the bridal chamber was perfumed by an immense torch of ambergris, which weighed forty minas and had been bought with the whole taxes of Persia for one year.

The khalifat gave all his love and passion to this new bride, and she bore him a son, whom he called Abbas. The mother of Abbas was ever considered among the most learned and eloquent women whose names have honoured the history of Islam.

"I will tell you another and very different tale from the life of Al-Mamun," said the youth, and he began:

THE PERILS OF INSISTENCE

When the khalifat Muhamad Al-Amin, the son of Haroun Al-Rachid and Zobeida, had been slain after his defeat, by order of the general of Al-Mamun's army, all the provinces which had held by Al-Amin hastened to submit themselves to Al-Mamun, who was the dead man's half-brother by a slave named Marahil. The new khalifat inaugurated his reign with a sweeping clemency towards his foes, and would often be heard to say: "If my enemies knew my goodness of heart, they would place themselves in my hands and confess their deeds."

Now the directing hand in all the oppressions which Al-Mamun had suffered, during the lifetime of his father Al-Rachid and of his brother Al-Amin, had been the hand of Zobeida herself. When she heard of her son's lamentable end, her first thought was to take refuge from her stepson's vengeance upon the holy ground of Mecca; but, after many days of vacillation, she decided to leave her fate to the man who had disinherited her and to whom she had so long given the bitterest cup which it was within her power to mingle. So she wrote the following letter:

"O Commander of the Faithful, however great a fault may be, it looks a little thing to the vision of your mercy. Before your greatness of heart crime itself can appear but as an error.

"The sender of this supplication begs you to recall a memory as dear to you as it is to her, and to pardon the transgressor of today for the sake of him who was the darling of our common yesterdays.

"If you will take pity upon my weakness and destitution, if you will find mercy for one who has deserved no mercy, you will be acting as he would have acted who were he alive today, would be the first to intercede for me. O son of your father, remember your father, and do not close your heart to the prayer of his unfortunate widow."

When the khalifat Al-Mamun had read this letter, his heart was so moved with pity that he wept for the tragedy of his brother Al-Amin and for the straits to which Zobeida had been reduced. He rose from his place at length and wrote this answer:

"My mother, your words found my heart a-crumble with regret. Allah is my witness that I feel for my father's widow as I would feel towards my own mother.

"No man may call back the decisions of Destiny, but I will do my best to attenuate your grief. I have given order to restore your confiscated lands to you, your houses, your goods, and all which a contrary fate has taken from you. If you return among us, my mother, you will find your former state undimmed and the veneration of your subjects unabated.

"I wish you to know that you have lost one son only, and that another remains to you, who is ready to prove himself as devoted as the dead.

"May peace and security abide with you!"

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-ninety-fourth Night
Had Come

She said:

Also, when Zobeida came weeping and failing to cast herself at his feet, Al-Mamun rose in her honour and kissed her hand and shed tears upon her breast. He gave back all those prerogatives due to the wife of Al-Rachid and a princess of the royal blood, and treated his stepmother, until the end of her life, as if he had been the child of her body. But, in spite of all this illusion of power, the queen could never forget the former reality nor cease to mourn over the death of Al-Amin. Until her last hour she nursed a sort of resentment towards the khalifat, and, though she hid this carefully, it could not but be apparent to Al-Mamun.

The khalifat suffered this smouldering enmity without complaint. Here is an example of Zobeida's rancour and his clemency.

Al-Mamun entered her apartment one day and saw that her lips moved as she looked towards him. Since he could not hear her words, he said: "I am afraid, dear mother, that you are cursing me because the heretic Persians slew your son and left the throne vacant for my occupation. Yet there can be no fault with Allah." But Zobeida denied this, saying: "I swear by the holy memory of your father that no such thought was in my mind." "Then will you tell me," urged the khalifat, "what you muttered as you looked at me?"

Zobeida lowered her head as one who will not speak. "I beg to be excused from answering," she said. But Al-Mamun was too curious to let the matter drop, and pressed so strongly that at last the queen burst out: "If you must know, I was cursing the folly of insistence; I was saying: 'Allah confound the importunity of man!'" "What put such a speech into your mind?" asked the khalifat, and Zobeida answered:

"O Commander of the Faithful, one day I lost a game of chess which I was playing against your father, Haroun Al-Rachid, and, as we had a wager on the result, he insisted that I should walk through the palace and the gardens quite naked at the dead of night. In spite of my supplications and entreaties, he refused to consider any other forfeit, and I was forced to obey. When I returned after this walk, I was mad with rage and half dead from weariness and cold.

"Next morning it was my turn to win and impose conditions.

"I took a long time to consider what was the most disagreeable action to which I could condemn my husband, and at last bade him pass the night in the arms of the ugliest and dirtiest of our kitchen slaves. A certain Marahil combined these two qualifications; so, at sunset, I led Al-Rachid to the stinking cellar where she had her being, and obliged him to remain with her all of the night. In the morning his state was lamentable and he felt horribly.

"Now it was from that cohabitation in filth that you were born, O Commander of the Faithful.

"Thus blindly I brought into the world the death of my son Al-Amin and the cause of all our woe.

"This would not have happened, except for my insistence that your father should love the slave and his insistence that I should walk naked at the dead of night.

"That is why I cursed the folly of insistence and the importunity of man."

Al-Mamun hastened from the queen's presence to hide his confusion. As he went, he said to himself: "As Allah lives, the lesson is applicable to me also, for, had it not been for my insistence, I would not have been reminded of that disreputable episode."

Then said the rich young man to his guests: "I trust, my friends, that Allah has used me as a pathway between true learning and your ears. I have given you a share of those riches which may be gathered without pain and enjoyed without danger. Today I will say no more, but another time, if Allah wills, I shall show you further of those marvels which are the most precious inheritance our fathers left us.''

Then he distributed a hundred gold pieces and a square of precious material to each of his hearers as a reward for their attention. ''One must encourage the seed,'' he said to himself, ''and make the way easy when it leads to good.''

He regaled them all with an excellent supper and sent them upon their way in peace.

So much for them. But Allah knows all!

When she had made an end of this admirable series of tales, Shahrazade fell silent, and King Shahryar cried: ''O Shahrazade, you have instructed me in many things, but I think that you have forgotten to speak of the wazir Giafar. I have long desired to hear all that you know concerning him, for I find that he strangely resembles in his quality my own grand-wazir, your excellent father. It is that likeness which urges me to hear the whole of his surely admirable story.'' But Shahrazade hung her head, as she replied: ''Allah keep us from calamity, O king of time, and have compassion upon Giafar the Barmacide and all his people! I beg you to excuse me from telling that story, for it is full of tears. Alas, who would not weep to hear of the end of Giafar, and of his father Yahia, and of his brother Al-Fadl, and of all the Barmicides! So lamentable was their taking off that stone itself would become tender at the telling of it.'' ''Yet tell me all the same, O Shahrazade,'' said King Shahryar, ''and may Allah keep us from all calamity!''

So Shahrazade said:

THE END OF GIAFAR AND THE BARMACIDES

Here then, O auspicious king, is that sorry tale which mars the reign of the khalifat Haroun Al-Rachid with a bloodstain which not even the four rivers shall wash away.

As is already known, O King of time, Giafar was one of the four sons of Yahia bin Khalid bin Barmak. His eldest brother, Al-Fadl, was in some sort Al-Rachid's foster-brother, for, because of the great friendship which existed between the family of Yahia and that of the Abbassides, and because of the tender affection which bound the two women themselves, Al-Rachid's mother, the Princess Khayrazan, and Al-Fadl's mother, the noble Itabah, exchanged nurslings and each gave to her friend's son that milk which Allah had destined for her own. That is why Al-Rachid always spoke of Yahia as: "My father," and Al-Fadl as: "My brother."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-ninety-fifth Night
Had Come

She said:

The most reliable chroniclers place the origin of the Barmacides in the city of Balgh in Khorasan, where they occupied a position of great distinction. It was not until a little more than a hundred years after the hegira of our Prophet (upon whom be prayer and peace!) that the family moved to Damascus and took root there under the dynasty of Omar. In the reign of Hisham, the head of the house was converted from the Magian cult and became ennobled in Islam.

But it was not until the accession of the Abbassides that the family was admitted into the counsels of the court, and began to brighten the earth with its glory. Khalid bin Barmak was made grand-wazir by Abu'l Abbas As-Saffah, the first of the Abbassides; and, during the reign of Al-Mahdi, the third in the line of Abbas, Yahia bin Khalid was charged with the education of Haroun Al-Rachid, the khalifat's favourite son, who was born only seven days after Al-Fadl, Yahia's son.

When Al-Rachid was invested with the supreme power, after the unexpected death of his brother Al-Hadi, he had no need to go back to the memories of his earliest youth, spent with the Barmacide children, before calling Yahia and his two sons to share in his aggrandizement; it was only necessary for him to recall his education by Yahia and the devotion which that good man had shown in braving the menaces of Al-Hadi in order to assure his pupil's inheritance. On the very night of Al-Hadi's death the tyrant had given order that Yahia and his children should be beheaded.

When Yahia went in the middle of the night with Masrur to tell Haroun that he was now master of the empire and khalifat of Allah upon earth, Al-Rachid immediately named him grand-wazir and raised his two sons, Al-Fadl and Giafar, to be wazirs under him. This action augured most happily for the new reign.

After that the Barmacides were an ornament for the brow of their century, and a crown upon its head. Destiny showered her most favourable gifts upon them, so that Yahia and his sons became bright stars, vast oceans of generosity, impetuous torrents of kindness, beneficent rains. The world lived at their breath, and under their hands the empire reached the pinnacle of its splendour. They were the refuge of the afflicted, the final resort of the comfortless. The poet Abu Nowas said of them:

Since earth has put you away, O sons of Barmak,
The roads of morning twilight and evening twilight
Are empty. My heart is empty, O sons of Barmak.

They were admirable wazirs, wise administrators, they filled the public treasure. They were strong, eloquent, and of a good counsel; they surpassed in learning; their generosity equalled the generosity of Hatim Tayy. They were rivers of happiness, they were good winds bringing up the fruitful clouds; it was through them that the name and glory of Haroun Al-Rachid clanged from the flats of Central Asia to the northern forests, from Morocco and Andalusia to the farthest bounds of China and Tartary.

And suddenly the sons of Barmak were cast from the greatest height which men have reached, to the lowest depths of horror; they drank the most bitter cup which calamity can pour. Alas, for the unfaith of time, they had not only ruled a vast empire, they had been the dear friends, the inseparable companions of their king. Giafar was the life of Al-Rachid's eyes; his place was so great in the khalifat's mind and heart that, one day, Haroun even had a double mantle made, so that they both could wear it and be, as it were, one man. Such were the terms on which they lived together until the final tragedy.

O pain of my soul, listen to the coming of that black cloud which veiled the sky of Islam and cast dismay upon every heart!

One day—be such days far from us!—Al-Rachid, returning from Mecca, went by water from Hira to the city of Anbar. He halted at the monastery of Al-Umr, on the banks of the Euphrates, and night found him in feasts and pleasures, as so many other nights had found him.

But this time his dear companion, Giafar, was not with him; he had gone for a few days of hunting in the plains of the river. Gifts and messages from the khalifat followed him everywhere in his sport. No hour passed without the arrival at his tent of some messenger, bearing a precious reminder of Al-Rachid's love.

Now that night—be such nights far from us!—Giafar sat in his tent with the doctor Gibrayl Bakhtiassu, Al-Rachid's personal physician, and with the khalifat's favourite poet, blind Abu-Zakar. Haroun had deprived himself of the company of both these men, in order that the one might watch over Giafar's health and the other entertain him with his improvisations.

It was the time of the evening meal, and Abu-Zakar, the blind poet, was playing upon the mandoline and singing verses of fickle chance.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-ninety-sixth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

SUDDENLY MASRUR, the khalifat's sword bearer, the instrument of his anger, strode unceremoniously into the tent. When Giafar saw him thus enter, in defiance of all etiquette, without demanding an audience or even announcing his proposed visit, he turned yellow in the face, and said: "You are welcome, Masrur, your presence is ever a fresh delight. But I must confess, my brother, that I am astonished to see you come to me, for the first time in your life, without sending some servant to give news of your arrival." "The matter is too grave for ceremony," replied Masrur, without deigning the least salute to his old friend, "Rise up now, Giafar, and testify to your faith for the last time. The Commander of the Faithful demands your head from me."

Giafar rose to his feet, and said: "There is no God but Allah, and Muhamad is the Prophet of Allah! From His hands we come and, soon or late, to His hands we return again!" Then he faced his old friend of so many years and moments, and cried out: "O Masrur, it is impossible. Our master must have given you the order in a moment of drunkenness. I conjure you, by our walks together and our community of life by day and night, to return to the khalifat; for I believe that you will find he has forgotten what he said." But Masrur answered: "It is my head or yours. I cannot return with my duty unfulfilled. Write your last wishes, for that is the only privilege I can accord you in memory of our ancient friendship." Then said Giafar: "We belong to Allah! I have no last wishes to write. May Allah prolong the span of the Commander of the Faithful by those days which are shorn from mine."

He left the tent, knelt upon the leather of blood which Masrur had already spread, and bandaged his eyes with his own hands. Then his head was struck off. Allah have him in His mercy!

After this, Masrur returned to the khalifat, and entered the royal presence bearing Giafar's head upon a shield. Al-Rachid looked at the head of his old friend and, leaning forward suddenly, spat upon it.

But his resentment was stronger than death. He ordered the body to be crucified at one end of the bridge of Baghdad, and the head to be exposed at the other. This punishment was more degrading than any which had ever been inflicted upon even the worst of malefactors. At the end of six months he ordered that his wazir's remains should be burnt on cattle dung and scattered among the privies.

O pitiful misery, that the scribe Amrani should have been able to write on the same page of the register of treasury accounts: "For a robe of state, given by the Commander of the Faithful to his wazir Giafar, son of Yahia Al-Barmaki, four hundred thousand dinars of gold," and, a little further down: "Naphtha, reeds, and dung to burn the body of Giafar bin Yahia, ten silver dirhams."

Such was the end of Giafar. Yahia his father, the guide of Al-Rachid's infancy, and Al-Fadl his brother, Al-Rachid's foster-brother, were arrested on the morning following the execution, and with them were taken all the rest of the Barmacides, to the number of about a thousand, who had any public charge or employment. They were thrown into foul dungeons, their great riches were confiscated, their wives and children were left without shelter, shunned by the regard of man. Some died of starvation, and others were strangled; but Yahia, his son Al-Fadl, and his brother Muhamad, died under the torture. Allah have them all in His mercy! Their fall was great!

And now, O King of Time, if you wish to hear me speak of the cause of this disgrace and lamentable death:

One day, some years after the end of the Barmacides, Aliyah, Al-Rachid's young sister, plucked up heart to say to him: "My lord, I have not known you pass one tranquil day since the death of Giafar and the disappearance of his family. How did he come to merit such disgrace?" Al-Rachid's face grew dark, and he pushed her away, saying: "My child, my life, my sole remaining happiness, how would it advantage you to know the reason? If I thought that my shirt knew, I would tear my shirt in pieces."

The historians and annalists are far from being agreed as to the cause of this catastrophe. Here are some of the differing versions which they give of the events which may be supposed to have led up to it.

According to some, Al-Rachid became offended at last by the extravagant liberalities of Giafar and the Barmacides, the tale of which became a weariness even in the ears of those who benefitted, and which called forth rather envy and dislike than grateful friendship. There was never mention of any other house than theirs; one could not come to the royal favour save through them, directly or indirectly; members of their family filled all the highest positions at court, and in the army, of the magistrature, and about the provinces; the fairest properties near the city belonged to them; their palace was more encumbered by courtiers and petitioners than that of the khalifat himself. Al-Rachid's doctor, that same Gibrayl Bakhtiassu who was with Giafar in his tent on the night of doom, has said concerning the splendour of the Barmacides:

"One day I entered Al-Rachid's apartments, in his palace called Kasr al Khuld at Baghdad. The Barmacides dwelt on the other bank of the Tigris, so that there was only the width of the river between the two dwellings. The khalifat, after remarking the number of horses which were being held near the step of his favourites and the crowd pressing about their door, said in my hearing, but as if to himself: 'May Allah reward Yahia and his two sons! They bear all the burden of my reign, leaving me free to look about me and live at ease.' But, on another occasion, I saw that he was beginning to regard the Barmacides in a different manner. As he looked out of the window upon the same affluence of men and horses, he said: 'Yahia and his sons have taken the management of my reign away from me. They are the true power and I am only a figure.' This I heard, and from that time made sure of the disgrace of the Barmacides."

According to other historians, the growing jealousy of Al-Rachid was framed by the many enemies which the pride of the Barmacides raised up against him, and by anonymous detractors, who allowed unsigned bitter verses and perfidious prose to come to the ears of the khalifat. These same annalists aver that it was a grave indiscretion on the part of Giafar which placed the final stone on the tower of his master's resentment. Once, when Al-Rachid had commanded him secretly to destroy a descendant of Ali and Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet, a man named Al-Sayed Yahia bin Abdalla Al-Hossayni, Giafar had pity upon this Alide and allowed him to escape, although the khalifat had marked him as a danger to the dynasty of Abbas. This generous action was reported to Al-Rachid, with exaggeration and distortion; and it became that drop of gall which overflowed the angry cup. When he was questioned, Giafar frankly confessed what he had done, and said: "I acted for the glory and good name of my master." "You acted well,'' answered Al-Rachid, turning very pale, but he was heard to mutter to himself: ''Allah do so to me and more also, if I do not destroy you, Giafar!''

Other historians would trace the fall of the Barmacides to their heretical opinions in the face of Islamic orthodoxy. It must not be forgotten that, when they lived in Balkh before their conversion to the Faith, they practised the Magian cult. During the expedition into Khorasan, the birthplace of the Barmacides, Al-Rachid noticed that Yahia and his sons exerted all their power to prevent the destruction of the temples and monuments of the Magi. His suspicion of their religious integrity grew greater afterwards, for he found that they always showed clemency to every kind of heretic, and especially to his personal enemies among the Guebers and Zanadiks. Those who hold this theory cite in proof of it the fact that serious religious troubles broke out in Baghdad immediately after the death of Al-Rachid, and almost proved the death-blow to orthodoxy.

But the most probable reason for the destruction of the Barmacides is adduced both by Ibn Khillikan, and by Ibn Al-Atir. They say:

''At the time when Giafar lay so near the heart of the khalifat that Al-Rachid had that double mantle made for the two of them, the khalifat could not abide to be separated from his favourite, and desired to look upon his face at all hours of the day and night. But Al-Rachid also loved, with a strange and deep tenderness, his own sister Abbassah, perhaps the most beautiful and cultivated woman of her time. No other of her sex influenced Al-Rachid so greatly, and he was as incapable of living without her as if she had been a woman Giafar. These two loves made up his happiness; yet, for his joy's perfection, they had to be indulged at the same time. Thus it was necessary that the two favourites should be present together. But the law of our Faith forbids a man to look upon a woman, or for a woman to be looked upon by a man, unless he be her husband or near relation. To transgress this law is to lose honour, and therefore Al-Rachid, who was a strict observer of the law which it was his high privilege to administer, could not enjoy the simultaneous presence of Giafar and Abbassah without the constraint of veils and the irksomeness of silence.

"That is why he one day said to Giafar: 'My friend, I have no true pleasure save when I sit with you and my dear sister Abbassah. I wish you to wed the girl; but I forbid you to come together save in my presence, and I insist that there shall be no consummation of the marriage, lest the noble sons of Abbas be cheated out of their inheritance.' Giafar bowed before the desire of his master, and had, perforce, to accept this marriage with all its unnatural conditions.

"The young husband and wife met only in the presence of the khalifat, and even then their glances hardly crossed. Al-Rachid rejoiced at the new arrangement and seemed not to know that he was torturing his two best friends. How can love be controlled by a third person? How can such restraint between two young and handsome beings not break out into the flame of love?

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-ninety-seventh Night
Had Come

She said:

"These two married lovers, who had every right to come together and yet could not, sighed more deeply every day, and felt that drunkenness which, when it is hidden, becomes a fever about the heart. Abbassah, in her deprivation, became madly desirous of her husband. At length she told her love, coming upon Giafar in secret as often as she was able and soliciting him to grant her right; but the wazir was too loyal and too prudent to give way to her. He was bound by his oath to Al-Rachid, and he also knew how hasty the khalifat could be in his anger.

"When Princess Abbassah saw that her entreaties were in vain, she took the part of all women and sought out a devious way. She sent a message to the noble Itabah, the mother of Giafar, saying: 'O our mother, I require you to introduce me into Giafar's household, as if I were one of those slaves which you procure for him every day.' It was a fact that Itabah would send her dear son a fresh and chosen virgin slave each Thursday, and that the wazir would not touch this child until he had eaten richly and partaken of generous wines.

"But Itabah vehemently refused to lend herself to the betrayal, and sent back word to the princess that danger for all the world might lurk in this affair. Then the young wife became insistent even to the point of using threats. 'Reflect on the consequences of your refusal,' she said, 'My resolution is taken and I shall reach my end in spite of you and by any means. I would rather die than lose Giafar and my rights in him.'

"So Itabah was forced to consent, for she realised that, if this trick had to be played, it would be better to play it under the most hopeful conditions. She promised the princess her help in that plot which was at once so innocent and so dangerous, and immediately told Giafar that she meant to send him a slave of unparalleled beauty. She painted the girl in such warm colours, that her son kept on referring to this gift and showed every sign of impatience that the night should come. When she saw that she had worked upon him sufficiently, Itabah sent word to her daughter-in-law, saying: 'Be ready for to-night.'

"Abbassah decked herself for her part, and then went to the house of Giafar's mother, who, at nightfall, introduced her into the apartment of her son. Giafar, whose senses were a little dulled by the fermentation of the wines, did not recognise his wife in the virgin slave who stood before him. It must be remembered that neither had looked often or directly on the other's face, for fear of the khalifat's resentment, and that modesty had ever caused Abbassah to turn away from Giafar's furtive glances.

"The marriage became a marriage in fact, and, after a night of mutual transport, Abbassah rose, saying: 'How do you like king's daughters, my master? Are they different from slaves who are bought and sold?' 'King's daughters?' asked the astonished Giafar, 'Are you one yourself? Are you some captive of our victorious arms?' 'O Giafar,' she answered, 'I am both a captive and a slave. I am Abbassah, sister of Al-Rachid, daughter of Al-Mahdi. I am of the blood of Abbas, uncle of the Prophet (upon whom be prayer and peace!).'

"These words cleared off the last clouds of Giafar's drunkenness, and he cried: 'You have destroyed yourself, you have destroyed me, O daughter of my masters!'

"He hastened to Itabah, and said to her: 'O mother, mother you have sold me cheap!' For answer, Yahia's trembling wife told her son how she had been forced to forward this stratagem, in order to save her household from a worse misfortune.

"In fulness of time Abbassah bore a son whom she confided to Ryash, a man faithful in her service, and to the nursing of a woman called Barrah. Then, fearing lest a rumour of this birth should escape in spite of all her precautions, she sent her child to Mecca with his two guardians.

"Now Yahia, Giafar's father, was responsible for order in the palace and harem of Al-Rachid. After a certain hour of night he would shut all the communicating doors and take away the keys, a severity of discipline which soon caused discontent among the women and especially in the Lady Zobeida. When she complained to Al-Rachid and cursed the old man's misplaced zeal, he called Yahia to him, and asked: 'My father, what grievance has Zobeida against you?' 'Does she complain that I am lax in my supervision of the harem?' demanded Yahia. 'Not so, my father,' answered Al-Rachid with a smile. 'In that case,' cried the Barmacide, 'take no notice of what she says, O Commander of the Faithful!' And, after that, he redoubled his severity in door locking.

"Zobeida came to her lord a second time, crying out in bitter resentment against Yahia; so Al-Rachid tried to pacify her, saying: 'O daughter of my uncle, my guide and father Yahia is only obeying orders and doing his duty, when he schools my harem in this way.' 'If he is so deeply concerned with his duty,' retorted Zobeida with some feeling, 'why does he not begin by schooling the imprudence of his son?' 'What imprudence?' demanded Al-Rachid. Zobeida at once told him the whole story of Abbassah, though not as a matter of great importance. 'Are there proofs of this?' asked the khalifat in a sombre voice. 'What better proof could there be than the child himself?' demanded Zobeida. 'Where is he?' asked the khalifat, and she replied: 'In the Holy City, the cradle of our race.' 'Does any beside you know of these things?' he asked, and she replied: 'There is not a woman in the whole palace, not a slave who does not know.'

"Al-Rachid said no further word, but soon afterwards he departed on pilgrimage for Mecca and took Giafar with him.

"At once Abbassah sent a letter to Ryash and the nurse, ordering them to leave the city and pass into Yemen with the child.

"As soon as the khalifat arrived at Mecca he bade certain of his trusted spies make enquiry concerning the infant; and these soon returned with the news that they had found proof of his existence, and that he was in perfect health. In a few days the child was seized in Yemen and sent secretly to Baghdad.

"It was on his return from that pilgrimage, when lying at the monastery of Al-Umr near Anbar on the Euphrates, that Al-Rachid gave his fateful command to Masrur.

"Abbassah was buried alive with her son in a ditch dug in the floor of her apartment.

"Allah have them both in His compassion!"

It remains for me to say, O auspicious king, that other and quite worthy historians contend that Giafar and the Barmacides had done nothing to deserve their fate, and that it would not have come upon them if it had not been written in their destiny.

But Allah knows all!

The celebrated poet, Muhamad of Damascus, gives this final word concerning the Barmacides:

"One day I entered a hammam to take a bath, and the master detailed a handsome boy to serve me. As the cleansing proceeded, I began to chant to myself, led on by I know not what whim of the mind, certain verses which I had composed to celebrate the birth of a son to my benefactor, Al-Fadl bin Yahia Al-Barmaki. Suddenly the boy who was washing me fell to the floor in a swoon. When he came to himself a few moments later, his face was wet with tears, and he fled, leaving me alone in the water."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-ninety-eighth Night
Had Come

She said:

"In some astonishment I left the water and sharply reproached the master of the hammam for allowing me to be attended by an epilept. But the man swore that he had never noticed a sign of that malady in the youth, and, to prove his words, recalled the fugitive to my presence. 'What has happened to make this lord so discontented with you' he asked. The boy hung his head and then turned to me, saying: 'O my master, do you know the author of those verses which you were chanting while I bathed you?' 'I am the author,' I replied; and he continued: 'Then you are the poet Muhamad of Damascus. You made those verses to celebrate the birth of a son to Al-Fadl, the Barmacide. I beg you to excuse me if the sudden hearing of those lines gripped me about the heart and caused me to fall. I am that son, of whose coming you sang so excellently.' Then he fell into a second swoon.

"Moved to the soul to see the lad so reduced, and mindful that I owed to his father all my riches and the greater part of my fame, I lifted him and clasped him to my breast, saying: 'O son of that great generosity, I am old and have no heir. Come with me to the kadi, and I will adopt you as my son. You shall inherit all my goods when I am dead.'

"But the young Barmacide answered with further tears: 'May Allah pour His blessings upon you, O son of virtue! It would not sort with my dignity in His eyes to take back a single dirham which my father gave.'

"In spite of all my prayers, the child would accept nothing. They were of true blood, those Barmacides! Allah reward them according to their great deserts!"

As for the khalifat Haroun Al-Rachid: after his cruel vengeance for some wrong known only to himself and Allah, he returned to Baghdad, but passed it by. He found that he could not live any longer in that city which it had been his delight through so many years to embellish. He established himself at Rakah and never returned to the Place of Peace. This sudden abandonment of his capital by Al-Rachid inspired the poet Abbas bin Al-Ahnaf, who was of his train, to write the following lines:

Scarce had we made the camels kneel
Before we had to ride again,
The friends who watched our coming
Saw us turn the camels round.
They cried us welcome, but it was
"Farewell," that we replied again,
"Farewell, O city of Baghdad,
O consecrated ground."

Since the disappearance of his friends, Al-Rachid got no good of his sleep; his regrets burned him day and night, and he would have given his kingdom to bring back Giafar. If any courtiers had the misfortune to speak even a little slightingly of the Barmacides, the khalifat would angrily cry out on them: "Allah damn your fathers! Either cease from blaming them, or try to fill the place which they left empty."

Though he remained all-powerful until his death, Al-Rachid imagined that he was surrounded by traitors. He feared to be poisoned by his sons, who were indeed no cause for pride. At the begininng of a punitive expedition into Khorasan, from which he was not destined to return alive, he sadly admitted his doubts to Al-Tabari, the annalist, who was one of the courtiers most in his confidence. When Al-Tabari tried to reassure him as to certain presages of death which he had received, he drew the chronicler into the shadow of a great tree, where they might be rid of prying glances, and opened his robe to show him a silk bandage wrapped about his belly. "I have a deep and incurable disease," he said, "No one knows of it save you. And I have spies round me, sent by Al-Amin and Al-Mamun to filch away the little remainder of my life. They feel that I have lived too long. They have corrupted my most faithful servants. Masrur is the spy of my favourite son Al-Mamun, my doctor Gibrayl Bakhtiassu is Al-Amin's spy. And there are many more. Would you have proof of their plots? I have ordered a riding horse to be sent to me, and instead of choosing one with a strong and easy action, you will see them bring to me a worn beast, having a broken pace to aggravate my suffering."

This prophecy was fulfilled; Al-Rachid was given such a horse as he described, and he accepted it with a look of sad understanding to Al-Tabari.

A few weeks after this incident, Haroun saw in his dreams a hand stretched out above his head, holding a little red earth. A voice cried: "This shall be his sepulchre." "Where?" asked another voice, and the first replied: "In Tus."

Some days later the course of his malady obliged Al-Rachid to halt at Tus. At once he showed signs of grave disquiet, and sent Masrur to bring him a little earth from the outskirts of the city. The eunuch returned in an hour bearing a handful of red soil, and Al-Rachid cried: "There is no God but Allah, and Muhamad is the Prophet of Allah! My vision is accomplished, my death is very near!"

He did not see Irak again. The next day he was weaker, and said to those about him: "The moment is at hand. I was envied by all the world, but now the world might pity me."

He died at Tus on the third day of Jomadi, second in the one hundred-and-ninety-third year of the hegira. According to Abulfeda, he was forty-seven years, five months, and five days old at the time of his death. Allah pardon his mistakes and have him in pity! He was an orthodox khalifat.

Then, as Shahrazade saw that her story had moved King Shahryar to sorrow, she hastened to begin The Tender Tale of Prince Jasmin and Princess Almond.

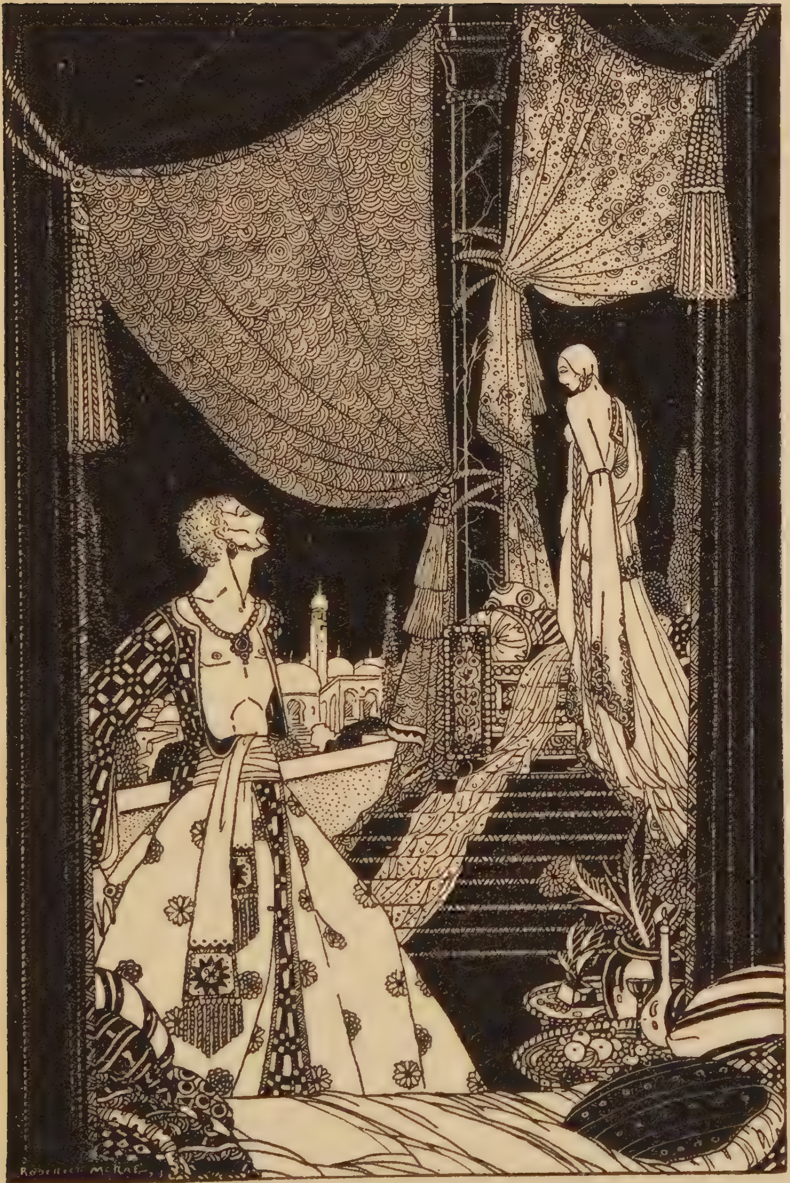
She said:

THE TENDER TALE OF PRINCE JASMIN AND PRINCESS ALMOND

It is related—but Allah in the Highest knows all!—that there was once, in a certain Mussulman country, an old king whose heart was as the ocean, who had the wisdom of Aflatun, whose nature was the nature of the Sages, whose glory surpassed the glory of Faridun, whose star was the star of Alexander, whose fortune was the fortune of the Persian Anushirwan. This king had seven sons, seven fires of the Pleiades. But the youngest was in everything the most excellent. He was white and rose, and his name was Prince Jasmin.

The lily faded when he was by, for he stood like a cypress and his cheeks were new tulips. The musk curls of his violet-tendrilled hair borrowed their darkness from a thousand nights, his colouring was blond amber, his lashes were curved arrows, his eyes were the long eyes of the jonquils, two pistachios formed the seduction of his lips. His brow shamed the moonlight, blotting the face of the full moon with blue; his mouth, whose teeth were diamonds and whose tongue was a rose, distilled a language sweeter than the sugar-cane. Bold and active and beautiful, he was made to be the god of lovers.

Prince Jasmin had been chosen from among his brothers to guard the vast buffalo herds of his father, King Nujum-Shah. As he sat one day in the lonely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"Tale of Prince Jasmin & Princess Almond"

pasturage, watching his charges and playing upon the flute, a venerable dervish approached him and, after greeting, begged him to draw off a little milk. "O holy man," answered the prince, "it grieves me bitterly that I cannot satisfy your need. I have milked all my buffaloes this morning, and there is nothing left with which to quench your thirst." "Nevertheless, call upon Allah's name," said the dervish, "and milk one of the animals a second time. I think that benediction will follow." At once the jonquil prince did as the old man suggested. He invoked the name of Allah and worked the udder of the fairest cow. Benediction followed, and the pail filled with foaming blue milk. Jasmin set the pail before his chance guest, and the dervish drank until he was satisfied. Then he smiled and turned to the prince, saying: "Delicate child, you have not wasted your milk, by giving it you have advanced your fortune. I came to you as a messenger of love and now I see that you deserve love's gift, which is the first gift and the last. A poet has said:

Love was before the light began,
When light is over, love shall be;
O warm hand in the grave, O bridge of truth,
O ivy's tooth
Eating the green heart of the tree
Of man!

"Yes, my son, I approach your heart as a messenger of love, and yet no one sent me. If I have crossed plains and deserts it was but to find a youth worthy to come near a girl, a fairy girl I chanced to see one morning as I passed her garden. You must know, O lighter than the breeze, that in the kingdom which marches with your father's, a girl of royal blood has seen you in her dreams. Her face is the moon's shame, she is one pearl lying in the casket of excellence, a spring of fair weather, a niche of beauty. Her slight body has the colour of silver, and stands like a box-tree; her waist is a hair's breadth, her station is the station of the sun, she has the walk of a partridge. Her hair is of hyacinth, her eyes are sabres of Ispahan; her cheeks resemble the verse of Beauty in the Book; the bows of her brows recall the chapter of the Pen. Her mouth, carved from ruby, is an astonishment; a dimpled apple is her chin, its beauty spot avails against the evil eye. Her very small ears wear lovers' hearts instead of jewels, the ring of her nose is a slave ring about the moon. The soles of her little feet are altogether charming. Her heart is a sealed flask of perfume, her soul is wise. Her approach is the tumult of the Resurrection! She is the daughter of King Akbar, and her name is Princess Almond. Such names are blessed!''

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nine-hundred-and-ninety-ninth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

AFTER DRAWING A LONG breath the dervish said again: ''But I should tell you, O river of sympathy, that it is within a liver burnt by sorrow that the child lodges her love; a mountain lies upon her heart because of a dream. She was as desolate as the sumbul when I left her. . . . And now that my words have cast the seed of love into your heart may Allah preserve you and lead you towards your destiny!"

The dervish rose and departed, leaving Prince Jasmin's heart transfixed and bleeding. As did Majnun in his love for Leila, he tore his robes from neck to waist, and sighed and cried, strangling in the curls of Princess Almond. He wandered away from his herd, drunk without wine, shaken and dazed by the whirlwind of his passion. The shield of wisdom is proof against many wounds, but not against the bow of love. The medicine of good counsel is unavailing to a soul stricken by that pure sentiment. So much for Prince Jasmin.

One night, as Princess Almond slept upon the terrace of her father's palace, she saw a dream sent by the Jinn of love, and in it a youth fairer than Zuleika's lover, a counterpart, line for line and beauty for beauty, of Prince Jasmin. As this vision became ever more clear to the eyes of her maiden soul, her careless heart slipped from her fingers and became enmeshed in the twined curls of the boy. She woke with her pulse beating to the rose of dreams, and, as she cried into the darkness like a nightingale, tears came to bathe the hot silver of her cheeks. Her maidens ran to her, crying: "In Allah's name, what are these tears upon the face of Almond? What has passed in her heart as it slept? Alas, alas, the bird of her reason has flown away!"

Their lamentation lasted till morning, and at dawn the king and queen were told of the princess' grief. They ran in their anxiety to her chamber, where she sat with disordered hair and robes, with no news of her body and no attention for her heart. She answered all their questions with silence and a modest shaking of the head, so that they sorrowed exceedingly.

They brought doctors and conjurors to her, but these made her worse, for they thought it necessary to bleed her. They bound her arm and pricked it with their lancet, but not one drop of blood came from that charming vein. They ceased from their operation and went their way, shaking their heads and saying that there was no hope.

Some days passed without any coming forward to understand this malady. Then her maidens led the fevered Almond to the garden, hoping that this might be a distraction for her. But, wherever her eyes glanced, they recognised her love: the roses told her of his body, the jasmin spoke of the perfume of his garments, the cypress called to mind his balance, and the narcissus looked upon her with his eyes. She seemed to see his lashes in thorns, and pressed them to her heart.

When the greenness of the garden had a little recovered her parched heart, and the stream of which they made her drink had cooled her mind, her girls sat in a circle about her and sang a light ghazal for her delight.

Then, seeing that she was more ready to take heed, her dearest servant moved near to her, saying: "O our mistress, a few days ago a young flute player came to our fields from the land of the noble Hazara; the melody of his voice would bring back reason, would check the flowing of water and the flight of swallows. He is white and rose, and his name is Jasmin. The lily fades when he is by, for he stands like a cypress and his cheeks are new tulips. The musk curls of his violet-tendrilled hair borrow their darkness from a thousand nights. His colouring is blond amber, his lashes are curved arrows, his eyes are the long eyes of the jonquils, two pistachios form the seduction of his lips. His brow shames the moonlight, blotting the face of the full moon with blue; his mouth, whose teeth are diamonds and whose tongue is a rose, distils a language sweeter than sugar-cane. Bold and active and beautiful, he is made to be the god of lovers. . . . This princely flute-player has come, lighter and more agile than the morning breeze, over difficult mountains to our land. He has crossed the running of great rivers, where the swan herself would have no confidence, where the waterfowl and wild drakes would turn giddy and undergo a thousand astonishments. Would he have faced these ardours had it not been for love?"

The girl fell silent, and Akbar's ailing daughter rose up, happy and dancing, upon her two feet. Her cheeks were lighted by a red fire within, her drunken soul looked from her eyes. No trace of her malady remained, the simple words of a girl speaking of love had scattered it like smoke.

She entered her own apartments, as light and swift as a gazelle. She wrote with the pen of joy upon the paper of meeting. She wrote to Prince Jasmin, who had stolen her reason, who had glowed before the eyes of her spirit. She wrote this white-winged letter:

"*After praise to Him who, without ink or pen, has written the life of His creatures within the garden of beauty,*

"*Greeting to the rose who has made drunk the nightingale!*

"*When I heard tell of your beauty, my heart slipped from my hand.*

"*When I saw your face in dreams, I forgot my father and mother, and became a stranger in my own house. What are father or mother, when a maiden is made stranger even to herself?*

"In your presence the fair are swept down as by a torrent; the arrows of your eyes have cleft my heart in twain.

"Oh, show me the beauty of yourself in my waking, that my living eyes may see. You, who are learned in the science of love, must know that the heart's road leads to the heart.

"You are the water and clay of my being; the roses of my bed have turned to thorns; the seal of silence is upon my lips, and I have forgotten my careless walking."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Thousandth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

SHE FOLDED THE wings of this letter, slipping a grain of musk between them, and gave it to her favourite. The girl carried it over her heart and went, like a homing pigeon, to the wood where Jasmin played his flute. She found him seated below a cypress, singing this short ghazal:

I see in my heart
Clouds and lights dart,
Part quicksilver, part
  Blood on the sea.
When the night has gone
We shall be joined anon
Like river and swan,
  I and she.

He read the letter and well-nigh swooned for joy, knowing not if he slept or waked. His heart glowed like a furnace and waves troubled the surface of his soul; it was in a daze that he heard the plans and instructions of his mistress.

At the determined hour the angel of meeting led Jasmin along the path to Almond's garden. He scaled the walls into this fragment of Paradise, just as the sun was sinking in the western haze and the moon showed her face below the veils of the East. He walked, as lightly as a fawn, to a certain tree which the young confidant had described, and climbed up to hide himself in the branches.

Princess Almond came with night into the garden. She was dressed in blue and held a blue rose in her hand. She trembled like the leaves of a willow, as she lifted her head towards the tree; she could not determine whether she saw the full moon caught in the branches or whether Jasmin waited for her there. But soon, as a flower ripened by desire, a fruit heavy with its precious weight, the boy slipped from the branches, and covered the pale feet of the princess with his violet-tendrilled hair. She recognised her dream and found the truth of its image fairer. Jasmin saw that the dervish had not lied, and that this moon was the crown of moons. Their hearts were bound together tenderly, their happiness was as great as the happiness of Majnun and Leila, as pure as the friendship of old men.

After most sweet kisses and blossoming of the soul, they prayed to the Master of perfect love that the tyrant sky should never rain his bolts upon them, to ravish the seam of their enchantment. As a first resource against separation, they decided that Almond should immediately interview her father, the king, as he loved her and could refuse her nothing.

She left Jasmin beneath the trees and entered her father's presence as a suppliant, joining her hands, and saying: "O high noon of the two worlds, your servant wishes to ask a favour." The king was both astonished and delighted; he lifted her in his hands and pressed her to his bosom, as he answered: "Surely, O Almond of my heart, it must be an urgent favour which brings you from your bed in the midst of night to beg for it. But whatever it may be, light of my eye, trust in your father and speak fearlessly." The gentle Almond hesitated for a little, and then, raising her face to the king's spoke thus with subtlety: "My strength and health have returned to me after taking an evening walk in the meadow with my girls. I have interrupted you thus unseasonably to tell you that I noticed how ill our cattle and sheep were kept. It came into my mind that, if I should meet a worthy herd or shepherd, I would bring him to your notice. Hardly had I had this thought, when, by a happy chance, I came upon a most diligent and active man. He is young and well-disposed; he fears neither trouble nor fatigue, laziness and carelessness are removed by many parasangs from his heart. O father, I beg you to put him in charge of our flocks and herds."

King Akbar listened to this discourse with astonished bulging eyes. "By my life," he cried, "I have never heard of a shepherd being engaged in the middle of the night. But your recovery has so delighted me that I swear to employ the herd of your choice, if I think him suitable when I have seen him."

Princess Almond went on the wings of joy to find Jasmin under the trees. She took him by the hand and led him into her father's presence, saying: "Here is the excellent shepherd of whom I spoke; his heart is proved, his crook is strong.'' Now Allah had graced King Akbar with intelligence, and he was puzzled to see that the youth whom his daughter brought to him was quite unlike the run of herd boys. As he was determining to keep silence concerning these important differences, rather than distress his child, the princess read his thought and, joining her hands together, said in a most moving voice: ''Father, the outside is not always an index to the inside. I assure you that this young man is used to herding lions.'' So, to please her, King Akbar put the finger of consenting to his eye and, in the middle of the night, engaged Prince Jasmin to watch his flocks and herds.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

And her sister, little Doniazade, who had become in all things desirable, a girl each day and every night more ripe and charming, more silent, more understanding, and more attentive, half rose from her carpet, saying: ''O Shahrazade, how sweet and delectable are your words, how pleasant to our taste!'' Shahrazade smiled and embraced her, as she answered: ''They are nothing to those which I should use tomorrow night, if our master, this exquisitely mannered king, were not weary of my talking.'' ''O Shahrazade,'' cried King Shahryar, ''how can you hint at such a possibility? You have calmed my heart and taught my soul. There has been a blessing upon the land since you came to me. Rest assured that you may finish your delightful tale tomorrow; even tonight, if you are not too tired. I am eager to know what happened to Prince Jasmin and Princess Almond.'' But Shahrazade said no more that night.

The king pressed her to his heart and slept by her side until the morning. When he arose and went to sit in judgment, he saw his wazir come, bearing a winding sheet destined for Shahrazade; for the old man every day expected that he would hear of her death, because of the oath which Shahryar had sworn. The king said nothing to allay his fear, but entered the diwan and sat there, giving judgment, raising some and debasing others, commanding and concluding cases, until the fall of day.

But When
The Thousand-and-first Night
Had Come

And King Shahryar had come as usual to Shahrazade, little Doniazade said to her sister: "Please, please tell us the rest of the tender tale of Prince Jasmin and Princess Almond, if you are not too weary." Shahrazade caressed the little one's hair, as she answered: "With all my heart and as in duty bound to this magnanimous king."

And she continued:

After that time Prince Jasmin lived the outer life of a shepherd, but his interior being was occupied with love. By day he pastured his sheep and cattle at three or four parasangs from the palace; but, when evening came, he called them together with his flute, and led them back to the stables of the king. At night he stayed in the garden with his mistress Almond, that rose of excellence. Such was the tenor of his life.

But who may hold even the most hidden happiness to be safe for ever from the jealousy of censure?

In her love for him, Almond would send her herd boy food and drink into the woods. One day her passion led her to an imprudence, and she bore the dish herself, delicacies fit for his sugar lips, fruits, nuts, and pistachios, pleasantly arranged upon the silver spaces. As she gave these things, she said: "May they be of easy digestion, eloquent little parrot, O comfit eater!" With that she disappeared like camphor.

When this peeled almond had disappeared like camphor, Jasmin made ready to taste the delicacies; but he had hardly lifted the first of them to his mouth before he saw the princess's uncle coming towards him, a hostile and ill-intentioned old man, who spent his days in detestation of the world, preventing musicians from their instruments and singers from their singing.

This vile busybody suspiciously asked what the herd was doing with the king's dish; but Jasmin, who thought no evil and had a heart as generous as an Autumn rose, only supposed that his questioner wished to eat, and therefore gave him all the good things for himself.

The calamitous uncle carried the dish to King Akbar, and, by its means, proved there to be some relation between Almond and Jasmin.

The king raged at this discovery, and called his daughter into his presence. "Shame of your fathers," he cried, "you have brought disgrace upon our house! Until today our dwelling was free from the thorns and bitter herbs of shame. But you have caught my neck in the running noose of your deceit, and have veiled the lamp of my intelligence with your cajolery. What man may boast that he is safe from women? The Prophet (on whom be prayer and peace!) has said: 'My Faithful, your wives and daughters are the chief of your foes. They lack both reason and probity. They were born of a twisted rib. It is your duty to reprimand them and, when they disobey, to beat them.' What shall I do to you, now that you have played the wanton with a stranger, a herd boy, whom it would be beneath your dignity to marry? Shall I cut off your heads with a single blow of my sword? Shall I burn the two of you in the fires of death?" Then, as she wept, he added: "Go from my presence now and bury yourself behind the curtain of the harem. Do not come out until I give you leave."

When he had thus punished his daughter, King Akbar gave orders for the destruction of her shepherd. There was a wood near that city, a lair of wild and terrifying beasts. Brave men shook and felt their hair stand upon end when the name of that wood was spoken before them. In its shade morning appeared as night, and night as the sinister dawn of Resurrection. Among the horrors of it were two pig-deer, which terrorised both bird and beast, and sometimes carried devastation into the city.

At their father's order, Almond's brothers sent Jasmin to perish in this terrifying place. Thinking no evil, he led the sheep and cattle of his charge into the wood, at that hour when the two-horned star shows upon the horizon and the Ethiopian of the night turns round his face to flee away. He left his flocks to feed at their will, and sat down upon a white skin, to draw the wine notes from his flute. Suddenly the two ravening pig-deer, who had been guided by his human smell, bounded into the clear space where he sat, bellowing like thunder clouds. The sweet-eyed prince drew them with the sounds of his flute and tamed them with the glory of his playing. When he rose silently and left the forest, the two fierce beasts accompanied him, going upon his right and left; and the flocks and herds came after. At last, beneath the very windows of the king, Jasmin enticed the pig-deer into an iron cage.

When Jasmin offered his captives to the king, Akbar felt himself to be in a difficulty, and revoked the sentence of death which he had passed.

But the princes, who would not so easily forego their resentment, plotted together to marry their sister to a detested cousin, the son of that calamitous uncle. "We must bind the feet of this mad girl with the marriage rope," they said, "then perhaps she will forget her other and inordinate affection." For this purpose they assembled musicians and singers, fife players and drummers, and made ready the procession.

Watched by her tyrannical brothers, the desolate Almond, who had been clothed against her will in splendid robes and the gold ornaments of marriage, sat on an elegant couch of gold brocade, a flower upon a bed of flowers, silent as a lily, motionless as an idol. She seemed as one dead among the living, her heart beat like a captive bird; her soul was mantled in grey dusk, and her breast torn by the nail of grief; her urgent spirit gloomily foreshadowed the muddy crow who should soon lie with her. She sat throned upon a very Caucasus of grief.

But Jasmin, who had come with the other servants to the bridal of his mistress, gave her hope to drink from a single glance of his eyes. Surely the looks of lovers can say twenty things.

When night came and the princess had been led to the marriage chamber, Destiny turned a fortunate face to the lovers and stayed their hearts with the eight odours. Taking advantage of the little moment before her bridegroom should come to her, Almond glided from the chamber in her gold robes and fled to Jasmin. These two delightful children took hands and vanished, more lightly than the dew-wet breeze of morning.

Nothing has since been heard of them, or their abiding place. There are few upon this earth worthy of happiness, worthy to take the road which leads to happiness, worthy to draw near the house of happiness.

Therefore glory and everlasting praise be to the Master of happiness! Amen.

CONCLUSION

"Such, O auspicious king," said Shahrazade, "is the tender tale of Prince Jasmin and Princess Almond. I have told it as I heard it. But Allah knows all!"

Then she fell silent, and King Shahryar cried: "O Shahrazade, that was a noble and admirable story! O wise and subtle one, you have taught me many lessons, letting me see that every man is at the call of Fate; you have made me consider the words of kings and peoples passed away; you have told me some things which were strange, and many that were worthy of reflection. I have listened to you for a thousand nights and one night, and now my soul is changed and joyful, it beats with an appetite for life. I give thanks to Him who has perfumed your mouth with so much eloquence and has set wisdom to be a seal upon your brow!"

Little Doniazade rose quite up from her carpet, and ran to throw her arms about her sister, crying: "O Shahrazade, how soft and delicate are your words, how moving and delightful! With what a savour they have filled our hearts! Oh, how beautiful are your words, my sister!"

Shahrazade leaned over the child and, as she embraced her, whispered some words which caused her to glide from the room, as camphor melts before the sun.

Shahrazade stayed alone with Shahryar, but, as he was preparing to take this marvellous bride between his joyful arms, the curtains opened and Doniazade re-appeared, followed by a nurse with twin children hanging at her breasts. A third child hurried after them on all fours.

Shahrazade embraced the three little ones and then ranged them before Shahryar; her eyes filled with tears, as she said: "O king of time, behold these three whom Allah has granted to us in three years."

While Shahryar kissed the children and was moved with joy through all his body to touch them, Shahrazade said again: "Your eldest son is more than two years old, and these twins will soon be one. Allah protect them from the evil eye! You remember, O king of time, that I was absent through sickness for twenty days between the six hundred and seventy-ninth night and the seven hundredth. It was during that absence that I gave birth to the twins. They pained and wearied me a great deal more than their elder brother in the previous year. With him I was so little disturbed that I had no need to interrupt the tale of Sympathy the Learned, even for one night."

She fell silent, and King Shahryar, looking from her to his sons and from his sons to her, could say no word.

Then little Doniazade turned from kissing the infants for a twentieth time, and said to Shahryar:

"Will you destroy the mother of your sons, and leave three little kings to miss her love?"

"Be quiet and have no fear, young girl," answered King Shahryar, between two fits of sobbing. It was not for a long time that he could master his emotion, and say: "O Shahrazade, I swear by the Lord of Pity that you were already in my heart before the coming of these children. He had given you gifts with which to win me; I loved you in my soul because I had found you pure, holy, chaste, tender, straightforward, unassailable, ingenious, subtle, eloquent, discreet, smiling, and wise. May Allah bless you, my dear, your father and mother, your root and race! O Shahrazade, this thousand and first night is whiter for us than the day!" When he had said these things, he rose and embraced the woman's head.

Shahrazade took her king's hand and carried it to her lips, her heart, and her brow, saying: "O lord of time, I beg you to call your old wazir, that he may rejoice at my salvation and partake in the benediction of this night."

So the king sent for his wazir, and the old man entered, carrying Shahrazade's winding sheet over his arm, for he was sure that her hour had come at last. Shahryar rose in his honour and kissed him between the eyes, saying: "O father of Shahrazade, O begetter of benediction, Allah has raised up your daughter to be the salvation of my people. Repentance has come to me through her!" Joy penetrated the old man's heart so suddenly that he fell into a swoon. When rose-water had brought him to himself, Shahrazade and Doniazade kissed his hand, and he blessed them. The rest of that night passed for them all in a daze of happiness.

Shahryar sent for his brother Shahzaman, king of Samarkand Al-Ajam, and went out to meet his coming with a glorious retinue. The city was gay with flags, and in the streets and markets the people burnt incense, sublimated camphor, aloes, Indian musk, nard, and ambergris. They put fresh henna upon their fingers and saffron upon their faces. Drums, flutes, clarinets, fifes, cymbals, and dulcimers filled every ear with a rejoicing sound.

While great feasts were being given at the royal expense, King Shahryar took his brother aside and spoke of the life which he had led with Shahrazade for the last three years. He recounted for Shahzaman's benefit some of the maxims, phrases, tales, proverbs, jests, anecdotes, characteristics, marvels, poems, and recitations which he had heard during that time. He praised the wazir's daughter for her eloquence, wisdom, purity, piety, sweetness, honesty, and discretion. ''She is my wife,'' he said, ''the mother of my children.''

When King Shahzaman had a little recovered from his astonishment, he said: ''Since you have been so fortunate, I too will marry. I will marry Shahrazade's sister, the little one, I do not know her name. We shall be two brothers married to two sure and honest sisters; we will forget our old misfortune. That calamity touched me first, and then through me it reached to you. If I had not discovered mine, you would never have known of yours. Alas, my brother, I have been mournful and loveless during these years. Each night I have followed your example by taking a virgin to my bed, and every morning I have avenged our ills upon her life. Now I will follow you in a better deed, and marry your wazir's second daughter.''

Shahryar went joyfully to Shahrazade and told her that his brother had, of his own accord, elected Doniazade for his bride. "We consent, O king of time," she said, "on condition that your brother stays henceforth with us. I could not bear to be separated from my little sister, even for one hour. I brought her up and educated her; she could not part from me. If Shahzaman will give this undertaking, Doniazade shall be his slave. If not, we will keep her."

When Shahzaman heard Shahrazade's answer, he said: "As Allah lives, my brother, I had intended no less than to remain with you always. I feel now that I can never abide to be parted from you again. As for the throne of Samarkand, Allah will send to fill it." "I have longed for this," answered King Shahryar, "Join with me in thanks to Allah, my brother, that he has brought our hearts together again after so many months!"

The kadi and witnesses were summoned, and a marriage contract was written out for King Shahzaman and Doniazade. Rejoicings and illuminations with coloured fire followed upon the news of this; and all the city ate and drank at the king's expense for forty days and forty nights. The two brothers and two sisters entered the hammam and bathed there in rose-water, flower-water, scented willow-water, and perfumed water of musk, while eagle wood and aloes were burned about them.

Shahrazade combed and tressed her little sister's hair, and sprinkled it with pearls. Then she dressed her in a robe of antique Persian stuff, stitched with red gold and enhanced by drunken animals and swooning birds embroidered in the very colours of life. She put a fairy collar about her neck, and Doniazade became below her fingers fairer than Alexander's wife.

When the two kings had left the hammam and seated themselves upon their thrones, the bridal company, the wives of the emirs and notables, stood in two motionless lines to right and left. Time came, and the sisters entered between these living walls, each sustaining the other, and having the appearance of two moons in one night sky.

Then the noblest ladies there took Doniazade by the hand and, after removing her robes, dressed her in a garment of blue satin, a sea tint to make reason fail upon her throne. A poet said of her:

Her veil is torn from the bright blue
Which all the stars are hasting to,
Her lips control a hive of bees,
And roses are about her knees,
The white flakes of the jasmin twine
Round her twin sweetness carnaline,
Her waist is a slight reed which stands
Swayed on a hill of moving sands.

Shahzaman came down to be the first to look upon her. When he had admired her in this dress, he sat upon his throne again, and this was a signal for the second change. So Shahrazade and the women clad their bride in a robe of apricot silk. As she passed before her husband's throne, she justified the words of the poet:

You are more fair than a summer moon
  On a winter night, you are more fair.
  I said when I saw your falling hair:
"Night's black fain wing is hiding day."
  "A cloud, but lo! the moon is there,"
You, rose child, found to say.

When Shahzaman had come down and admired her in this dress, Shahrazade put a tunic of grenade velvet upon her sister. A poet said:

Red and slight as a running deer,
Small as a child with his father's bow,
Yet you so shine that when you go
The sun will fly and night appear.

After this Doniazade was habited in citron yellow silk with lines of pictures. A poet has said:

You are the fortunate moon which shone
On the road I used to take
Many a glad night for the sake
Of a once desirous one;
Yet if now a lover nears,
Unrecking silver fire,
Your breasts' two crimson granite spears
Are proof against desire.

Shahrazade led her slowly before the kings and all the company of guests. Shahzaman looked upon his bride and then, by returning to his place, gave signal for the final change. Shahrazade kissed the child long upon the mouth, and then dressed her in a robe of green, sewn with red gold and pearls. With careful fingers she pulled out the lines of this, and then set a light diadem of emeralds on her sister's brow. It was upon her arm that this small branch of ban, this camphor girl, walked through the hall. A poet has been inspired to sing:

Green leaves as fairly shade the red pomegranate flowers
As you, your light chemise.

I ask its name which suits your golden cheek,
You ponder and then speak:
"It has no name, for it is my chemise."
Yet I will call it murderer of ours,
A murderous chemise. . . .

Shahrazade slipped her hand to her sister's waist, and they walked before the kings and between the guests toward the inner chambers. Then the queen undressed little Doniazade and laid her upon the bed with such recommendations as were suitable. They kissed and wept in each other's arms for a little, as it was the first night for which they had been separated.

That was a white and joyful night for the two brothers and the two sisters, it was a fair continuation of the thousand and one which had gone before, a love tale better than all, the dawn of a new era for the subjects of King Shahryar.

When the brothers had come from the hammam in the morning and joined their wives, the wazir sought permission to enter. They rose in his honour and the two women kissed his hand; but, when he asked for the day's orders, the four said with one voice: "O father, we wish that you should give commands in the future and not receive them. That is why we make you king of Samarkand Al-Ajam." "I yield my throne to you," said Shahzaman; and Shahryar cried: "I will only give you leave to do so, my brother, if you will consent to share my royalty and reign with me day and day about." "I hear and I obey," said Shahzaman.

The wazir kissed his daughters in farewell, embraced the three little sons, and departed for Samarkand Al-Ajam at the head of a magnificent escort.

Allah had written him security in his journey, and the inhabitants of his new kingdom hailed his coming with delight. He reigned over them in all justice and became a king among great kings. So much for him.

After these things, King Shahryar called together the most renowned annalists and proficient scribes from all the quarters of Islam, and ordered them to write out the tales of Shahrazade from beginning to end, without the omission of a single detail. So they sat down and wrote thirty volumes in gold letters, and called this sequence of marvels and astonishments: THE BOOK OF THE THOUSAND NIGHTS AND ONE NIGHT. Many faithful copies were made, and King Shahryar sent them to the four corners of his empire, to be an instruction to the people and their children's children. But he shut the original manuscript in the gold cupboard of his reign and made his wazir of treasure responsible for its safe keeping.

King Shahryar and Queen Shahrazade, King Shahzaman and Queen Doniazade, and Shahrazade's three small sons lived year after year in all delight, knowing days each more admirable than the last and nights whiter than days, until they were visited by the Separator of friends, the Destroyer, the Builder of tombs, the Inexorable, the Inevitable.

Such are the excellent tales called THE THOUSAND NIGHTS AND ONE NIGHT, together with all that is in them of wonder and instruction, prodigy and marvel, astonishment and beauty.

But Allah knows all! He alone can distinguish between the true and the false. He knows all!

Now everlasting glory and praise be unto Him Who
rests Intangible amid Eternity; Who, changing all
things, yet Himself changes not; Who is the Master
of the Seen and of the Unseen; Who alone
lives! And prayer and peace with benediction be upon the King's Chosen,
our Lord Muhamad, Prince of
Messengers, Jewel of the
World, our Hope for an
auspicious
END!